BS
491
E96
1900
v.4

THE
BARNES REFERENCE LIBRARY.

THE GIFT OF
Alfred C. Barnes.

Not to be taken from the room.

B.1035

LIBRARY
3 1924 092 344 104

DATE DUE

DEC 16 76 D
JAN 25 1982 F

GAYLORD PRINTED IN U.S.A.

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924092344104

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE

EDITED BY THE REV.

W. ROBERTSON NICOLL, M.A., LL.D.

Editor of "The Expositor"

AUTHORIZED EDITION, COMPLETE
AND UNABRIDGED
BOUND IN TWENTY-FIVE VOLUMES

NEW YORK
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LAFAYETTE PLACE
1900

JUDGES AND RUTH.

BY THE REV.

ROBERT A. WATSON, D.D.,

AUTHOR OF "GOSPELS OF YESTERDAY."

NEW YORK

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

LAFAYETTE PLACE

1900

BS
491
E96
1900
v. 4

B. 1035

CONTENTS.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES.

I.

PAGE

PROBLEMS OF SETTLEMENT AND WAR 3

JUDGES I. 1—11.

II.

THE WAY OF THE SWORD 18

JUDGES I. 12—26.

III.

AT BOCHIM: THE FIRST PROPHET VOICE 31

JUDGES II. 1—5.

IV.

AMONG THE ROCKS OF PAGANISM 45

JUDGES II. 7—23.

V.

THE ARM OF ARAM AND OF OTHNIEL 61

JUDGES III. 1—11.

VI.

THE DAGGER AND THE OX-GOAD 77

JUDGES III. 12—31.

VII.

PAGE

THE SIBYL OF MOUNT EPHRAIM 91
JUDGES IV.

VIII.

DEBORAH'S SONG: A DIVINE VISION 106
JUDGES V.

IX.

DEBORAH'S SONG: A CHANT OF PATRIOTISM . . . 120
JUDGES V.

X.

THE DESERT HORDES; AND THE MAN AT OPHRAH . . 135
JUDGES VI. 1—14.

XI.

GIDEON, ICONOCLAST AND REFORMER 150
JUDGES VI. 15—32.

XII.

"THE PEOPLE ARE YET TOO MANY" 164
JUDGES VI. 33—VII. 7.

XIII.

"MIDIAN'S EVIL DAY" 178
JUDGES VII. 8—VIII. 21.

XIV.

GIDEON THE ECCLESIASTIC 193
JUDGES VIII. 22—28.

XV.

ABIMELECH AND JOTHAM 209
JUDGES VIII. 29—IX. 57.

XVI.

PAGE

GILEAD AND ITS CHIEF 224

JUDGES X. I—XI. II.

XVII.

THE TERRIBLE VOW 239

JUDGES XI. 12—40.

XVIII.

SHIBBOLETHS 254

JUDGES XII. I—7.

XIX.

THE ANGEL IN THE FIELD 266

JUDGES XIII. I—18.

XX.

SAMSON PLUNGING INTO LIFE 279

JUDGES XIII. 24—XIV. 20.

XXI.

DAUNTLESS IN BATTLE, IGNORANTLY BRAVE . . . 293

JUDGES XV.

XXII.

PLEASURE AND PERIL IN GAZA 307

JUDGES XVI. I—3.

XXIII.

THE VALLEY OF SOREK AND OF DEATH 319

JUDGES XVI. 4—31.

XXIV.

PAGE

THE STOLEN GODS 335

JUDGES XVII., XVIII.

XXV.

FROM JUSTICE TO WILD REVENGE 348

JUDGES XIX.—XXI.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

I.

NAOMI'S BURDEN 363

RUTH I. 1—13.

II.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS 375

RUTH I. 14—19.

III.

IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ 386

RUTH I. 19—II. 23.

IV.

THE HAZARDOUS PLAN 397

RUTH III.

V.

THE MARRIAGE AT THE GATE 408

RUTH IV

INDEX 421

I.

PROBLEMS OF SETTLEMENT AND WAR.

JUDGES i. 1-11.

IT was a new hour in the history of Israel. To a lengthened period of serfdom there had succeeded a time of sojourn in tents, when the camp of the tribes, half-military, half-pastoral, clustering about the Tabernacle of Witness, moved with it from point to point through the desert. Now the march was over; the nomads had to become settlers, a change not easy for them as they expected it to be, full of significance for the world. The Book of Judges, therefore, is a second Genesis or Chronicle of Beginnings so far as the Hebrew commonwealth is concerned. We see the birth-throes of national life, the experiments, struggles, errors and disasters out of which the moral force of the people gradually rose, growing like a pine tree out of rocky soil.

If we begin our study of the book expecting to find clear evidence of an established Theocracy, a spiritual idea of the kingdom of God ever present to the mind, ever guiding the hope and effort of the tribes, we shall experience that bewilderment which has not seldom fallen upon students of Old Testament history. Divide the life of man into two parts, the sacred and the secular; regard the latter as of no real value compared to the

other, as having no relation to that Divine purpose of which the Bible is the oracle; then the Book of Judges must appear out of place in the sacred canon, for unquestionably its main topics are secular from first to last. It preserves the traditions of an age when spiritual ideas and aims were frequently out of sight, when a nation was struggling for bare existence, or, at best, for a rude kind of unity and freedom. But human life, sacred and secular, is one. A single strain of moral urgency runs through the epochs of national development from barbarism to Christian civilization. A single strain of urgency unites the boisterous vigour of the youth and the sagacious spiritual courage of the man. It is on the strength first, and then on the discipline and purification of the will, that everything depends. There must be energy, or there can be no adequate faith, no earnest religion. We trace in the Book of Judges the springing up and growth of a collective energy which gives power to each separate life. To our amazement we may discover that the Mosaic Law and Ordinances are neglected for a time; but there can be no doubt of Divine Providence, the activity of the redeeming Spirit. Great ends are being served,—a development is proceeding which will by-and-by make religious thought strong, obedience and worship zealous. It is not for us to say that spiritual evolution ought to proceed in this way or that. In the study of natural and supernatural fact our business is to observe with all possible care the goings forth of God and to find as far as we may their meaning and issue. Faith is a profound conviction that the facts of the world justify themselves and the wisdom and righteousness of the Eternal; it is the key that makes history articulate, no mere tale full of sound and fury

signifying nothing. And the key of faith which here we are to use in the interpretation of Hebrew life has yet to be applied to all peoples and times. That this may be done we firmly believe: there is needed only the mind broad enough in wisdom and sympathy to gather the annals of the world into one great Bible or Book of God.

Opening the story of the Judges, we find ourselves in a keen atmosphere of warlike ardour softened by scarcely an air of spiritual grace. At once we are plunged into military preparations; councils of war meet and the clash of weapons is heard. Battle follows battle. Iron chariots hurtle along the valleys, the hillsides bristle with armed men. The songs are of strife and conquest; the great heroes are those who smite the uncircumcised hip and thigh. It is the story of Jehovah's people; but where is Jehovah the merciful? Does He reign among them, or sanction their enterprise? Where amid this turmoil and bloodshed is the movement towards the far-off Messiah and the holy mountain where nothing shall hurt or destroy? Does Israel prepare for blessing all nations by crushing those that occupy the land he claims? Problems many meet us in Bible history; here surely is one of the gravest. And we cannot go with Judah in that first expedition; we must hold back in doubt till clearly we understand how these wars of conquest are necessary to the progress of the world. Then, even though the tribes are as yet unaware of their destiny and how it is to be fulfilled, we may go up with them against Adoni-bezek.

Canaan is to be colonised by the seed of Abraham, Canaan and no other land. It is not now, as it was in

Abraham's time, a sparsely peopled country, with room enough for a new race. Canaanites, Hivites, Perizzites, Amorites cultivate the plain of Esdraelon and inhabit a hundred cities throughout the land. The Hittites are in considerable force, a strong people with a civilization of their own. To the north Phœnicia is astir with a mercantile and vigorous race. The Philistines have settlements southward along the coast. Had Israel sought a region comparatively unoccupied, such might, perhaps, have been found on the northern coast of Africa. But Syria is the destined home of the tribes.

The old promise to Abraham has been kept before the minds of his descendants. The land to which they have moved through the desert is that of which he took earnest by the purchase of a grave. But the promise of God looks forward to the circumstances that are to accompany its fulfilment; and it is justified because the occupation of Canaan is the means to a great development of righteousness. For, mark the position which the Hebrew nation is to take. It is to be the central state of the world, in verity the Mountain of God's House for the world. Then observe how the situation of Canaan fits it to be the seat of this new progressive power. Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, lie in a rude circle around it. From its sea-board the way is open to the west. Across the valley of Jordan goes the caravan route to the East. The Nile, the Orontes, the Ægean Sea are not far off. Canaan does not confine its inhabitants, scarcely separates them from other peoples. It is in the midst of the old world.

Is not this one reason why Israel must inhabit Palestine? Suppose the tribes settled in the highlands of Armenia or along the Persian Gulf; suppose them

to have migrated westward from Egypt instead of eastward, and to have found a place of habitation on towards Libya: would the history in that case have had the same movement and power? Would the theatre of prophecy and the scene of the Messiah's work have set the gospel of the ages in the same relief, or the growing City of God on the same mountain height? Not only is Canaan accessible to the emigrants from Egypt, but it is by position and configuration suited to develop the genius of the race. Gennesaret and Asphaltitis; the tortuous Jordan and Kishon, that "river of battles"; the cliffs of Engedi, Gerizim and Ebal, Carmel and Tabor, Moriah and Olivet, —these are needed as the scene of the great Divine revelation. No other rivers, no other lakes nor mountains on the surface of the earth will do.

This, however, is but part of the problem which meets us in regard to the settlement in Canaan. There are the inhabitants of the land to be considered—these Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Hivites. How do we justify Israel in displacing them, slaying them, absorbing them? Here is a question first of evolution, then of the character of God.

Do we justify Saxons in their raid on Britain? History does. They become dominant, they rule, they slay, they assimilate; and there grows up British nationality strong and trusty, the citadel of freedom and religious life. The case is similar, yet there is a difference, strongly in favour of Israel as an invading people. For the Israelites have been tried by stern discipline: they are held together by a moral law, a religion divinely revealed, a faith vigorous though but in germ. The Saxons worshipping Thor, Frea and Woden sweep religion before them in the first rush of

conquest. They begin by destroying Roman civilization and Christian culture in the land they ravage. They appear "dogs," "wolves," "whelps from the kennel of barbarism" to the Britons they overcome. But the Israelites have learned to fear Jehovah, and they bear with them the ark of His covenant.

As for the Canaanitish tribes, compare them now with what they were when Abraham and Isaac fed their flocks in the plain of Mamre or about the springs of Beersheba. Abraham found in Canaan noble courteous men. Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, Amorites, were his trusted confederates; Ephron the Hittite matched his magnanimity; Abimelech of Gerar "feared the Lord." In Salem reigned a king or royal priest, Melchizedek, unique in ancient history, a majestic unsullied figure, who enjoyed the respect and tribute of the Hebrew patriarch. Where are the successors of those men? Idolatry has corrupted Canaan. The old piety of simple races has died away before the hideous worship of Moloch and Ashtoreth. It is over degenerate peoples that Israel is to assert its dominance; they must learn the way of Jehovah or perish. This conquest is essential to the progress of the world. Here in the centre of empires a stronghold of pure ideas and commanding morality is to be established, an altar of witness for the true God.

So far we move without difficulty towards a justification of the Hebrew descent on Canaan. Still, however, when we survey the progress of conquest, the idea struggling for confirmation in our minds that God was King and Guide of this people, while at the same time we know that all nations could equally claim Him as their Origin, marking how on field after field thousands were left dying and dead, we have to find an answer

to the question whether the slaughter and destruction even of idolatrous races for the sake of Israel can be explained in harmony with Divine justice. And this passes into still wider inquiries. Is there intrinsic value in human life? Have men a proper right of existence and self-development? Does not Divine Providence imply that the history of each people, the life of each person will have its separate end and vindication? There is surely a reason in the righteousness and love of God for every human experience, and Christian thought cannot explain the severity of Old Testament ordinances by assuming that the Supreme has made a new dispensation for Himself. The problem is difficult, but we dare not evade it nor doubt a full solution to be possible.

We pass here beyond mere "natural evolution." It is not enough to say that there had to be a struggle for life among races and individuals If natural forces are held to be the limit and equivalent of God, then "survival of the fittest" may become a religious doctrine, but assuredly it will introduce us to no God of pardon, no hope of redemption. We must discover a Divine end in the life of each person, a member it may be of some doomed race, dying on a field of battle in the holocaust of its valour and chivalry. Explanation is needed of all slaughtered and "waste" lives, untold myriads of lives that never tasted freedom or knew holiness.

The explanation we find is this: that for a human life in the present stage of existence the opportunity of struggle for moral ends—it may be ends of no great dignity, yet really moral, and, as the race advances, religious—this makes life worth living and brings to every one the means of true and lasting gain. "Where

ignorant armies clash by night" there may be in the opposing ranks the most various notions of religion and of what is morally good. The histories of the nations that meet in shock of battle determine largely what hopes and aims guide individual lives. But to the thousands who do valiantly this conflict belongs to the vital struggle in which some idea of the morally good or of religious duty directs and animates the soul. For hearth and home, for wife and children, for chief and comrades, for Jehovah or Baal, men fight, and around these names there cluster thoughts the sacredest possible to the age, dignifying life and war and death. There are better kinds of struggle than that which is acted on the bloody field; yet struggle of one kind or other there must be. It is the law of existence for the barbarian, for the Hebrew, for the Christian. Ever there is a necessity for pressing towards the mark, striving to reach and enter the gate of higher life. No land flowing with milk and honey to be peaceably inherited and enjoyed rewards the generation which has fought its way through the desert. No placid possession of cities and vineyards rounds off the life of Canaanitish tribe. The gains of endurance are reaped, only to be sown again in labour and tears for a further harvest. Here on earth this is the plan of God for men; and when another life crowns the long effort of this world of change, may it not be with fresh calls to more glorious duty and achievement?

But the golden cord of Divine Providence has more than one strand; and while the conflicts of life are appointed for the discipline of men and nations in moral vigour and in fidelity to such religious ideas as they possess, the purer and stronger faith always giving more power to those who exercise it, there is also in

the course of life, and especially in the suffering war entails, a reference to the sins of men. Warfare is a sad necessity. Itself often a crime, it issues the judgment of God against folly and crime. Now Israel, now the Canaanite becomes a hammer of Jehovah. One people has been true to its best, and by that faithfulness it gains the victory. Another has been false, cruel, treacherous, and the hands of the fighters grow weak, their swords lose edge, their chariot-wheels roll heavily, they are swept away by the avenging tide. Or the sincere, the good are overcome; the weak who are in the right sink before the wicked who are strong. Yet the moral triumph is always gained. Even in defeat and death there is victory for the faithful.

In these wars of Israel we find many a story of judgment as well as a constant proving of the worth of man's religion and virtue. Neither was Israel always in the right, nor had those races which Israel overcame always a title to the power they held and the land they occupied. Jehovah was a stern arbiter among the combatants. When His own people failed in the courage and humility of faith, they were chastised. On the other hand, there were tyrants and tyrannous races, freebooters and banditti, pagan hordes steeped in uncleanness who had to be judged and punished. Where we cannot trace the reason of what appears mere waste of life or wanton cruelty, there lie behind, in the ken of the All-seeing, the need and perfect vindication of all He suffered to be done in the ebb and flow of battle, amid the riot of war.

Beginning now with the detailed narrative, we find first a case of retribution, in which the Israelites served the justice of God. As yet the Canaanite power was

unbroken in the central region of Western Palestine, where Adoni-bezek ruled over the cities of seventy chiefs. It became a question who should lead the tribes against this petty despot, and recourse was had to the priests at Gilgal for Divine direction. The answer of the oracle was that Judah should head the campaign, the warlike vigour and numerical strength of that tribe fitting it to take the foremost place. Judah accepting the post of honour invited Simeon, closely related by common descent from Leah, to join the expedition; and thus began a confederacy of these southern tribes which had the effect of separating them from the others throughout the whole period of the judges. The locality of Bezek which the king of the Canaanites held as his chief fortress is not known. Probably it was near the Jordan valley, about half-way between the two greater lakes. From it the tyranny of Adoni-bezek extended northward and southward over the cities of the seventy, whose submission he had cruelly ensured by rendering them unfit for war. Here, in the first struggle, Judah was completely successful. The rout of the Canaanites and Perizzites was decisive, and the slaughter so great as to send a thrill of terror through the land. And now the rude judgment of men works out the decree of God. Adoni-bezek suffers the same mutilation as he had inflicted on the captive chiefs and in Oriental manner makes acknowledgment of a just fate. There is a certain religiousness in his mind, and he sincerely bows himself under the judgment of a God against Whom he had tried issues in vain. Had these troops of Israel come in the name of Jehovah? Then Jehovah had been watching Adoni-bezek in his pride when as he daily feasted in his hall the crowd of victims grovelled at his feet like dogs.

Thus early did ideas of righteousness and of wide authority attach themselves in Canaan to the name of Israel's God. It is remarkable how on the appearance of a new race the first collision with it on the battle-field will produce an impression of its capacity and spirit and of unseen powers fighting along with it. Joshua's dash through Canaan doubtless struck far and wide a belief that the new comers had a mighty God to support them; the belief is reinforced, and there is added a thought of Divine justice. The retribution of Jehovah meant Godhead far larger and more terrible, and at the same time more august, than the religion of Baal had ever presented to the mind. From this point the Israelites, if they had been true to their heavenly King, fired with the ardour of His name, would have occupied a moral vantage ground and proved invincible. The fear of Jehovah would have done more for them than their own valour and arms. Had the people of the land seen that a power was being established amongst them in the justice and benignity of which they could trust, had they learned not only to fear but to adore Jehovah, there would have been quick fulfil-ment of the promise which gladdened the large heart of Abraham. The realization, however, had to wait for many a century.

It cannot be doubted that Israel had under Moses received such an impulse in the direction of faith in the one God, and such a conception of His character and will, as declared the spiritual mission of the tribes. The people were not all aware of their high destiny, not sufficiently instructed to have a competent sense of it; but the chiefs of the tribes, the Levites and the heads of households, should have well understood the part that fell to Israel among the nations of the world.

The law in its main outlines was known, and it should have been revered as the charter of the commonwealth. Under the banner of Jehovah the nation ought to have striven not for its own position alone, the enjoyment of fruitful fields and fenced cities, but to raise the standard of human morality and enforce the truth of Divine religion. The gross idolatry of the peoples around should have been continually testified against; the principles of honesty, of domestic purity, of regard for human life, of neighbourliness and parental authority, as well as the more spiritual ideas expressed in the first table of the Decalogue, ought to have been guarded and dispensed as the special treasure of the nation. In this way Israel, as it enlarged its territory, would from the first have been clearing one space of earth for the good customs and holy observances that make for spiritual development. The greatest of all trusts is committed to a race when it is made capable of this; but here Israel often failed, and the reproaches of her prophets had to be poured out from age to age.

The ascendency which Israel secured in Canaan, or that which Britain has won in India, is not, to begin with, justified by superior strength, nor by higher intelligence, nor even because in practice the religion of the conquerors is better than that of the vanquished. It is justified because, with all faults and crimes that may for long attend the rule of the victorious race, there lie, unrealised at first, in conceptions of God and of duty the promise and germ of a higher education of the world. Developed in the course of time, the spiritual genius of the conquerors vindicates their ambition and their success. The world is to become the heritage and domain of those who have the secret of large and ascending life.

Judah moving southward from Bezek took Jerusalem, not the stronghold on the hilltop, but the city, and smote it with the edge of the sword. Not yet did that citadel which has been the scene of so many conflicts become a rallying-point for the tribes. The army, leaving Adoni-bezek dead in Jerusalem, with many who owned him as chief, swept southward still to Hebron and Debir. At Hebron the task was not unlike that which had been just accomplished. There reigned three chiefs, Sheshai, Ahiman and Talmai, who are mentioned again and again in the annals as if their names had been deeply branded on the memory of the age. They were sons of Anak, bandit captains, whose rule was a terror to the country side. Their power had to be assailed and overthrown, not only for the sake of Judah which was to inhabit their stronghold, but for the sake of humanity. The law of God was to replace the fierce unregulated sway of inhuman violence and cruelty. So the practical duty of the hour carried the tribes beyond the citadel where the best national centre would have been found to attack another where an evil power sat entrenched.

One moral lies on the surface here. We are naturally anxious to gain a good position in life for ourselves, and every consideration is apt to be set aside in favour of that. Now, in a sense, it is necessary, one of the first duties, that we gain each a citadel for himself. Our influence depends to a great extent on the standing we secure, on the courage and talent we show in making good our place. Our personality must enlarge itself, make itself visible by the conquest we effect and the extent of affairs we have a right to control. Effort on this line needs not be selfish or egoistic in a bad sense. The higher self or spirit of a good man finds

in chosen ranges of activity and possession its true development and calling. One may not be a worldling by any means while he follows the bent of his genius and uses opportunity to become a successful merchant, a public administrator, a great artist or man of letters. All that he adds to his native inheritance of hand, brain and soul should be and often is the means of enriching the world. Against the false doctrine of self-suppression, still urged on a perplexed generation, stands this true doctrine, by which the generous helper of men guides his life so as to become a king and priest unto God. And when we turn from persons of highest character and talent to those of smaller capacity, we may not alter the principle of judgment. They, too, serve the world, in so far as they have good qualities, by conquering citadels and reigning where they are fit to reign. If a man is to live to any purpose, play must be given to his original vigour, however much or little there is of it.

Here, then, we find a necessity belonging to the spiritual no less than to the earthly life. But there lies close beside it the shadow of temptation and sin. Thousands of people put forth all their strength to gain a fortress for themselves, leaving others to fight the sons of Anak—the intemperance, the unchastity, the atheism of the time. Instead of triumphing over the earthly, they are ensnared and enslaved. The truth is, that a safe position for ourselves we cannot have while those sons of Anak ravage the country around. The Divine call therefore often requires of us that we leave a Jerusalem unconquered for ourselves, while we pass on with the hosts of God to do battle with the public enemy. Time after time Israel, though successful at Hebron, missed the secret and learnt in bitter sadness and loss how near is the shadow to the glory.

And for any one to-day, what profits it to be a wealthy man, living in state with all the appliances of amusement and luxury, well knowing, but not choosing to share the great conflicts between religion and ungodliness, between purity and vice? If the ignorance and woe of our fellow-creatures do not draw our hearts, if we seek our own things as loving our own, if the spiritual does not command us, we shall certainly lose all that makes life—enthusiasm, strength, eternal joy.

Give us men who fling themselves into the great struggle, doing what they can with Christ-born ardour, foot soldiers if nothing else in the army of the Lord of Righteousness.

II.

THE WAY OF THE SWORD.

JUDGES i. 12-26.

THE name Kiriath-sepher, that is Book-Town, has been supposed to point to the existence of a semi-popular literature among the pre-Judæan inhabitants of Canaan. We cannot build with any certainty upon a name; but there are other facts of some significance. Already the Phœnicians, the merchants of the age, some of whom no doubt visited Kiriath-sepher on their way to Arabia or settled in it, had in their dealings with Egypt begun to use that alphabet to which most languages, from Hebrew and Aramaic on through Greek and Latin to our own, are indebted for the idea and shapes of letters. And it is not improbable that an old-world Phœnician library of skins, palm-leaves or inscribed tablets had given distinction to this town lying away towards the desert from Hebron. Written words were held in half-superstitious veneration, and a very few records would greatly impress a district peopled chiefly by wandering tribes.

Nothing is insignificant in the pages of the Bible, nothing is to be disregarded that throws the least light upon human affairs and Divine Providence; and here we have a suggestion of no slight importance. Doubt has been cast on the existence of a written language

among the Hebrews till centuries after the Exodus. It has been denied that the Law could have been written out by Moses. The difficulty is now seen to be imaginary, like many others that have been raised. It is certain that the Phœnicians trading to Egypt in the time of the Hyksos kings had settlements quite contiguous to Goshen. What more likely than that the Hebrews, who spoke a language akin to the Phœnician, should have shared the discovery of letters almost from the first, and practised the art of writing in the days of their favour with the monarchs of the Nile valley? The oppression of the following period might prevent the spread of letters among the people; but a man like Moses must have seen their value and made himself familiar with their use. The importance of this indication in the study of Hebrew law and faith is very plain. Nor should we fail to notice the interesting connection between the Divine lawgiving of Moses and the practical invention of a worldly race. There is no exclusiveness in the providence of God. The art of a people, acute and eager indeed, but without spirituality, is not rejected as profane by the inspired leader of Israel. Egyptians and Phœnicians have their share in originating that culture which mingles its stream with sacred revelation and religion. As, long afterwards, there came the printing-press, a product of human skill and science, and by its help the Reformation spread and grew and filled Europe with new thought, so for the early record of God's work and will human genius furnished the fit instrument. Letters and religion, culture and faith must needs go hand in hand. The more the minds of men are trained, the more deftly they can use literature and science, the more able they should be to receive and convey the

spiritual message which the Bible contains. Culture which does not have this effect betrays its own pettiness and parochialism; and when we are provoked to ask whether human learning is not a foe to religion, the reason must be that the favourite studies of the time are shallow, aimless and ignoble.

Kiriath-sepher has to be taken. Its inhabitants, strongly entrenched, threaten the people who are settling about Hebron and must be subdued; and Caleb, who has come to his possession, adopts a common expedient for rousing the ambitious young men of the tribe. He has a daughter, and marriage with her shall reward the man who takes the fortress. It is not likely that Achsah objected. A courageous and capable husband was, we may say, a necessity, and her father's proposal offered a practical way of settling her in safety and comfort. Customs which appear to us barbarous and almost insulting have no doubt justified themselves to the common-sense, if not fully to the desires of women, because they were suited to the exigencies of life in rude and stormy times. There is this also, that the conquest of Kiriath-sepher was part of the great task in which Israel was engaged, and Achsah, as a patriotic daughter of Abraham, would feel the pride of being able to reward a hero of the sacred war. To the degree in which she was a woman of character this would balance other considerations. Still the custom is not an ideal one; there is too much uncertainty. While the rivalry for her hand is going on the maiden has to wait at home, wondering what her fate shall be, instead of helping to decide it by her own thought and action. The young man, again, does not commend himself by honour, but only by courage

and skill. Yet the test is real, so far as it goes, and fits the time.

Achsah, no doubt, had her preference and her hope, though she dared not speak of them. As for modern feeling, it is professedly on the side of the heart in such a case, and modern literature, with a thousand deft illustrations, proclaims the right of the heart to its choice. We call it a barbarous custom, the disposition of a woman by her father, apart from her preference, to one who does him or the community a service; and although Achsah consented, we feel that she was a slave. No doubt the Hebrew wife in her home had a place of influence and power, and a woman might even come to exercise authority among the tribes; but, to begin with, she was under authority and had to subdue her own wishes in a manner we consider quite incompatible with the rights of a human being. Very slowly do the customs of marriage even in Israel rise from the rudeness of savage life. Abraham and Sarah, long before this, lived on something like equality, he a prince, she a princess. But what can be said of Hagar, a concubine outside the home-circle, who might be sent any day into the wilderness? David and Solomon afterwards can marry for state reasons, can take, in pure Oriental fashion, the one his tens, the other his hundreds of wives and concubines. Polygamy survives for many a century. When that is seen to be evil, there remains to men a freedom of divorce which of necessity keeps women in a low and unhonoured state.

Yet, thus treated, woman has always duties of the first importance, on which the moral health and vigour of the race depend; and right nobly must many a Hebrew wife and mother have fulfilled the trust. It

is a pathetic story; but now, perhaps, we are in sight of an age when the injustice done to women may be replaced by an injustice they do to themselves. Liberty is their right, but the old duties remain as great as ever. If neither patriotism, nor religion, nor the home is to be regarded, but mere taste; if freedom becomes license to know and enjoy, there will be another slavery worse than the former. Without a very keen sense of Christian honour and obligation among women, their enfranchisement will be the loss of what has held society together and made nations strong. And looking at the way in which marriage is frequently arranged by the free consent and determination of women, is there much advance on the old barbarism? How often do they sell themselves to the fortunate, rather than reserve themselves for the fit; how often do they marry not because a helpmeet of the soul has been found, but because audacity has won them or jewels have dazzled; because a fireside is offered, not because the ideal of life may be realized. True, in the worldliness there is a strain of moral effort often pathetic enough. Women are skilful at making the best of circumstances, and even when the gilding fades from the life they have chosen they will struggle on with wonderful resolution to maintain something like order and beauty. The Othniel who has gained Achsah by some feat of mercantile success or showy talk may turn out a poor pretender to bravery or wit; but she will do her best for him, cover up his faults, beg springs of water or even dig them with her own hands. Let men thank God that it is so, and let them help her to find her right place, her proper kingdom and liberty.

There is another aspect of the picture, however, as it unfolds itself. The success of Othniel in his attack

on Kiriath-sepher gave him at once a good place as a leader, and a wife who was ready to make his interests her own and help him to social position and wealth. Her first care was to acquire a piece of land suitable for the flocks and herds she saw in prospect, well watered if possible,—in short, an excellent sheep-farm. Returning from the bridal journey, she had her stratagem ready, and when she came near her father's tent followed up her husband's request for the land by lighting eagerly from her ass, taking for granted the one gift, and pressing a further petition—"Give me a blessing, father. A south land thou hast bestowed, give me also wells of water." So, without more ado, the new Kenazite homestead was secured.

How Jewish, we may be disposed to say. May we not also say, How thoroughly British? The virtue of Achsah, is it not the virtue of a true British wife? To urge her husband on and up in the social scale, to aid him in every point of the contest for wealth and place, to raise him and rise with him, what can be more admirable? Are there opportunities of gaining the favour of the powerful who have offices to give, the liking of the wealthy who have fortunes to bequeath? The managing wife will use these opportunities with address and courage. She will light off her ass and bow humbly before a flattered great man to whom she prefers a request. She can fit her words to the occasion and her smiles to the end in view. It is a poor spirit that is content with anything short of all that may be had: thus in brief she might express her principle of duty. And so in ten thousand homes there is no question whether marriage is a failure. It has succeeded. There is a combination of man's strength and woman's wit for the great end of "getting on." And in ten thou-

sand others there is no thought more constantly present to the minds of husband and wife than that marriage is a failure. For restless ingenuity and many schemes have yielded nothing. The husband has been too slow or too honest, and the wife has been foiled; or, on the other hand, the woman has not seconded the man, has not risen with him. She has kept him down by her failings; or she is the same simple-minded, homely person he wedded long ago, no fit mate, of course, for one who is the companion of magnates and rulers. Well may those who long for a reformation begin by seeking a return to simplicity of life and the relish for other kinds of distinction than lavish outlay and social notoriety can give. Until married ambition is fed and hallowed at the Christian altar there will be the same failures we see now, and the same successes which are worse than "failures."

For a moment the history gives us a glimpse of another domestic settlement. "The children of the Kenite went up from the City of Palm Trees with the children of Judah," and found a place of abode on the southern fringe of Simeon's territory, and there they seem to have gradually mingled with the tent-dwellers of the desert. By-and-by we shall find one Heber the Kenite in a different part of the land, near the Sea of Galilee, still in touch with the Israelites to some extent, while his people are scattered. Heber may have felt the power of Israel's mission and career and judged it wise to separate from those who had no interest in the tribes of Jehovah. The Kenites of the south appear in the history like men upon a raft, once borne near shore, who fail to seize the hour of deliverance and are carried away again to the wastes of sea. They are part of the

drifting population that surrounds the Hebrew church, type of the drifting multitude who in the nomadism of modern society are for a time seen in our Christian assemblies, then pass away to mingle with the careless. An innate restlessness and a want of serious purpose mark the class. To settle these wanderers in orderly religious life seems almost impossible; we can perhaps only expect to sow among them seeds of good, and to make them feel a Divine presence restraining from evil. The assertion of personal independence in our day has no doubt much to do with impatience of church bonds and habits of worship; and it must not be forgotten that this is a phase of growing life needing forbearance no less than firm example.

Zephath was the next fortress against which Judah and Simeon directed their arms. When the tribes were in the desert on their long and difficult march they attempted first to enter Canaan from the south, and actually reached the neighbourhood of this town. But, as we read in the Book of Numbers, Arad the king of Zephath fought against them and took some of them prisoners. The defeat appears to have been serious, for, arrested and disheartened by it, Israel turned southward again, and after a long *détour* reached Canaan another way. In the passage in Numbers the overthrow of Zephath is described by anticipation; in Judges we have the account in its proper historical place. The people whom Arad ruled were, we may suppose, an Edomite clan living partly by merchandise, mainly by foray, practised marauders, with difficulty guarded against, who having taken their prey disappeared swiftly amongst the hills.

In the world of thought and feeling there are many

Zephaths, whence quick outset is often made upon the faith and hope of men. We are pressing towards some end, mastering difficulties, contending with open and known enemies. Only a little way remains before us. But invisible among the intricacies of experience is this lurking foe who suddenly falls upon us. It is a settlement in the faith of God we seek. The onset is of doubts we had not imagined, doubts of inspiration, of immortality, of the incarnation, truths the most vital. We are repulsed, broken, disheartened. There remains a new wilderness journey till we reach by the way of Moab the fords of our Jordan and the land of our inheritance. Yet there is a way, sure and appointed. The baffled, wounded soul is never to despair. And when at length the settlement of faith is won, the Zephath of doubt may be assailed from the other side, assailed successfully and taken. The experience of some poor victims of what is oddly called philosophic doubt need dismay no one. For the resolute seeker after God there is always a victory, which in the end may prove so easy, so complete, as to amaze him. The captured Zephath is not destroyed nor abandoned, but is held as a fortress of faith. It becomes Hormah—the Consecrated.

Victories were gained by Judah in the land of the Philistines, partial victories, the results of which were not kept. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron were occupied for a time; but Philistine force and doggedness recovered, apparently in a few years, the captured towns. Wherever they had their origin, these Philistines were a strong and stubborn race, and so different from the Israelites in habit and language that they never freely mingled nor even lived peaceably with the tribes. At

this time they were probably forming their settlements on the Mediterranean seaboard, and were scarcely able to resist the men of Judah. But ship after ship from over sea, perhaps from Crete, brought new colonists; and during the whole period till the Captivity they were a thorn in the side of the Hebrews. Beside these, there were other dwellers in the lowlands, who were equipped in a way that made it difficult to meet them. The most vehement sally of men on foot could not break the line of iron chariots, thundering over the plain. It was in the hill districts that the tribes gained their surest footing,—a singular fact, for mountain people are usually hardest to defeat and dispossess; and we take it as a sign of remarkable vigour that the invaders so soon occupied the heights.

Here the spiritual parallel is instructive. Conversion, it may be said, carries the soul with a rush to the high ground of faith. The Great Leader has gone before preparing the way. We climb rapidly to fortresses from which the enemy has fled, and it would seem that victory is complete. But the Christian life is a constant alternation between the joy of the conquered height and the stern battles of the foe-infested plain. Worldly custom and sensuous desire, greed and envy and base appetite have their cities and chariots in the low ground of being. So long as one of them remains the victory of faith is unfinished, insecure. Piety that believes itself delivered once for all from conflict is ever on the verge of disaster. The peace and joy men cherish, while as yet the earthly nature is unsubdued, the very citadels of it unreconnoitred, are visionary and relaxing. For the soul and for society the only salvation lies in mortal combat—life-long, age-long combat with the earthly and the false. Nooks enough may be found

among the hills, pleasant and calm, from which the low ground cannot be seen, where the roll of the iron chariots is scarcely heard. It may seem to imperil all if we descend from these retreats. But when we have gained strength in the mountain air it is for the battle down below, it is that we may advance the lines of redeemed life and gain new bases for sacred enterprise.

A mark of the humanness and, shall we not also say, the divineness of this history is to be found in the frequent notices of other tribes than those of Israel. To the inspired writer it is not all the same whether Canaanites die or live, what becomes of Phœnicians or Philistines. Of this we have two examples, one the case of the Jebusites, the other of the people of Luz.

The Jebusites, after the capture of the lower city already recorded, appear to have been left in peaceful possession of their citadel and accepted as neighbours by the Benjamites. When the Book of Judges was written Jebusite families still remained, and in David's time Araunah the Jebusite was a conspicuous figure. A series of terrible events connected with the history of Benjamin is narrated towards the end of the Book. It is impossible to say whether the crime which led to these events was in any way due to bad influence exercised by the Jebusites. We may charitably doubt whether it was. There is no indication that they were a depraved people. If they had been licentious they could scarcely have retained till David's time a stronghold so central and of so much consequence in the land. They were a mountain clan, and Araunah shows himself in contact with David a reverend and kingly person.

As for Bethel or Luz, around which gathered notable associations of Jacob's life, Ephraim, in whose territory

it lay, adopted a stratagem in order to master it, and smote the city. One family alone, the head of which had betrayed the place, was allowed to depart in peace, and a new Luz was founded "in the land of the Hittites." We are inclined to regard the traitor as deserving of death, and Ephraim appears to us disgraced, not honoured, by its exploit. There is a fair, straightforward way of fighting; but this tribe, one of the strongest, chooses a mean and treacherous method of gaining its end. Are we mistaken in thinking that the care with which the founding of the new city is described shows the writer's sympathy with the Luzzites? At any rate, he does not by one word justify Ephraim; and we do not feel called on to restrain our indignation.

The high ideal of life, how often it fades from our view! There are times when we realize our Divine calling, when the strain of it is felt and the soul is on fire with sacred zeal. We press on, fight on, true to the highest we know at every step. We are chivalrous, for we see the chivalry of Christ; we are tender and faithful, for we see His tenderness and faithfulness. Then we make progress; the goal can almost be touched. We love, and love bears us on. We aspire, and the world glows with light. But there comes a change. The thought of self-preservation, of selfish gain, has intruded. On pretext of serving God we are hard to man, we keep back the truth, we use compromises, we descend even to treachery and do things which in another are abominable to us. So the fervour departs, the light fades from the world, the goal recedes, becomes invisible. Most strange of all is it that side by side with cultured religion there can be proud sophistry and ignorant scorn, the very treachery of the

intellect towards man. Far away in the dimness of Israel's early days we see the beginnings of a pious inhumanity, that may well make us stay to fear lest the like should be growing among ourselves. It is not what men claim, much less what they seize and hold, that does them honour. Here and there a march may be stolen on rivals by those who firmly believe they are serving God. But the rights of a man, a tribe, a church lie side by side with duties; and neglect of duty destroys the claim to what otherwise would be a right. Let there be no mistake: power and gain are not allowed in the providence of God to anyone that he may grasp them in despite of justice or charity.

One thought may link the various episodes we have considered. It is that of the end for which individuality exists. The home has its development of personality —for service. The peace and joy of religion nourish the soul—for service. Life may be conquered in various regions, and a man grow fit for ever greater victories, ever nobler service. But with the end the means and spirit of each effort are so interwoven that alike in home, and church, and society the human soul must move in uttermost faithfulness and simplicity or fail from the Divine victory that wins the prize.

III.

AT BOCHIM; THE FIRST PROPHET VOICE.

JUDGES ii. 1–5.

FROM the time of Abraham on to the settlement in Canaan the Israelites had kept the faith of the one God. They had their origin as a people in a decisive revolt against polytheism. Of the great Semite forefather of the Jewish people, it has been finely said, "He bore upon his forehead the seal of the Absolute God, upon which was written, This race will rid the earth of superstition." The character and structure of the Hebrew tongue resisted idolatry. It was not an imaginative language; it had no mythological colour. We who have inherited an ancient culture of quite another kind do not think it strange to read or sing:

> "Hail, smiling morn, that tip'st the hills with gold,
> Whose rosy fingers ope the gates of day,
> Who the gay face of nature dost unfold,
> At whose bright presence darkness flies away."

These lines, however, are full of latent mythology. The "smiling morn" is Aurora, the darkness that flies away before the dawn is the Erebus of the Greeks. Nothing of this sort was possible in Hebrew literature. In it all change, all life, every natural incident are ascribed to the will and power of one Supreme Being.

"Jehovah thundered in the heavens and the Highest gave His voice, hailstones and coals of fire." "By the breath of God ice is given, and the breadth of the waters is straitened." "Behold, He spreadeth His light around Him; . . . He covereth His hands with the lightning." "Thou makest darkness and it is night." Always in forms like these Hebrew poetry sets forth the control of nature by its invisible King. The pious word of Fénelon, "What do I see in nature? God; God everywhere; God alone," had its germ, its very substance, in the faith and language of patriarchal times.

There are some who allege that this simple faith in one God, sole Origin and Ruler of nature and life, impoverished the thought and speech of the Hebrews. It was in reality the spring and safeguard of their spiritual destiny. Their very language was a sacred inheritance and preparation. From age to age it served a Divine purpose in maintaining the idea of the unity of God; and the power of that idea never failed their prophets nor passed from the soul of the race. The whole of Israel's literature sets forth the universal sway and eternal righteousness of Him who dwells in the high and lofty place, Whose name is Holy. In canto and strophe of the great Divine Poem, the glory of the One Supreme burns with increasing clearness, till in Christ its finest radiance flashes upon the world.

While the Hebrews were in Egypt, the faith inherited from patriarchal times must have been sorely tried, and, all circumstances considered, it came forth wonderfully pure. "The Israelites saw Egypt as the Mussulman Arab sees pagan countries, entirely from the outside, perceiving only the surface and external things." They indeed carried with them into the desert the recollection

of the sacred bulls or calves of which they had seen images at Hathor and Memphis. But the idol they made at Horeb was intended to represent their Deliverer, the true God, and the swift and stern repression by Moses of that symbolism and its pagan incidents appears to have been effectual. The tribes reached Canaan substantially free from idolatry, though teraphim or fetishes may have been used in secret with magical ceremonies. The religion of the people generally was far from spiritual, yet there was a real faith in Jehovah as the protector of the national life, the guardian of justice and truth. From this there was no falling away when the Reubenites and Gadites on the east of Jordan erected an altar for themselves. "The Lord God of gods," they said, "He knoweth, and Israel he shall know if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the Lord." The altar was called *Ed*, a witness between east and west that the faith of the one Living God was still to unite the tribes.

But the danger to Israel's fidelity came when there began to be intercourse with the people of Canaan, now sunk from the purer thought of early times. Everywhere in the land of the Hittites and Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites, there were altars and sacred trees, pillars and images used in idolatrous worship. The ark and the altar of Divine religion, established first at Gilgal near Jericho, afterwards at Bethel and then at Shiloh, could not be frequently visited, especially by those who settled towards the southern desert and in the far north. Yet the necessity for religious worship of some kind was constantly felt; and as afterwards the synagogues gave opportunity for devotional gatherings when the Temple could not be reached, so in the earlier time there came to be sacred observances on elevated

places, a windy threshing-floor, or a hill-top already used for heathen sacrifice. Hence, on the one hand, there was the danger that worship might be entirely neglected, on the other hand the grave risk that the use of heathen occasions and meeting-places should lead to heathen ritual, and those who came together on the hill of Baal should forget Jehovah. It was the latter evil that grew; and while as yet only a few Hebrews easily led astray had approached with kid or lamb a pagan altar, the alarm was raised. At Bochim a Divine warning was uttered which found echo in the hearts of the people.

There appears to have been a great gathering of the tribes at some spot near Bethel. We see the elders and heads of families holding council of war and administration, the thoughts of all bent on conquest and family settlement. Religion, the purity of Jehovah's worship, are forgotten in the business of the hour. How shall the tribes best help each other in the struggle that is already proving more arduous than they expected? Dan is sorely pressed by the Amorites. The chiefs of the tribe are here telling their story of hardship among the mountains. The Asherites have failed in their attack upon the sea-board towns Accho and Achzib; in vain have they pressed towards Zidon. They are dwelling among the Canaanites and may soon be reduced to slavery. The reports from other tribes are more hopeful; but everywhere the people of the land are hard to overcome. Should Israel not remain content for a time, make the best of circumstances, cultivate friendly intercourse with the population it cannot dispossess? Such a policy often commends itself to those who would be thought prudent; it is apt to prove a fatal policy.

Suddenly a spiritual voice is heard, clear and intense, and all others are silent. From the sanctuary of God at Gilgal one comes whom the people have not expected; he comes with a message they cannot choose but hear. It is a prophet with the burden of reproof and warning. Jehovah's goodness, Jehovah's claim are declared with Divine ardour; with Divine severity the neglect of the covenant is condemned. Have the tribes of God begun to consort with the people of the land? Are they already dwelling content under the shadow of idolatrous groves, in sight of the symbols of Ashtoreth? Are they learning to swear by Baal and Melcarth and looking on while sacrifices are offered to these vile masters? Then they can no longer hope that Jehovah will give them the country to enjoy; the heathen shall remain as thorns in the side of Israel and their gods shall be a snare. It is a message of startling power. From the hopes of dominion and the plans of worldly gain the people pass to spiritual concern. They have offended their Lord; His countenance is turned from them. A feeling of guilt falls on the assembly. "It came to pass that the people lifted up their voice and wept."

This lamentation at Bochim is the second note of religious feeling and faith in the Book of Judges. The first is the consultation of the priests and the oracle referred to in the opening sentence of the book. Jehovah Who had led them through the wilderness was their King, and unless He went forth as the unseen Captain of the host no success could be looked for. "They asked of Jehovah, saying, Who shall go up for us first against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" In this appeal there was a measure of faith which is neither to be scorned nor suspected. The question

indeed was not whether they should fight at all, but how they should fight so as to succeed, and their trust was in a God thought of as pledged to them, solely concerned for them. So far accordingly there is nothing exemplary in the circumstances. Yet we find a lesson for Christian nations. There are many in our modern parliaments who are quite ready to vote national prayer in war-time and thanksgiving for victories, who yet would never think, before undertaking a war, of consulting those best qualified to interpret the Divine will. The relation between religion and the state has this fatal hitch, that however Christian our governments profess to be, the Christian thinkers of the country are not consulted on moral questions, not even on a question so momentous as that of war. It is passion, pride, or diplomacy, never the wisdom of Christ, that leads nations in the critical moments of their history. Who then scorn, who suspect the early Hebrew belief? Those only who have no right; those who as they laugh at God and faith shut themselves from the knowledge by which alone life can be understood; and, again, those who in their own ignorance and pride unsheathe the sword without reference to Him in Whom they profess to believe. We admit none of these to criticise Israel and its faith.

At Bochim, where the second note of religious feeling is struck, a deeper and clearer note, we find the prophet listened to. He revives the sense of duty, he kindles a Divine sorrow in the hearts of the people. The national assembly is conscience-stricken. Let us allow this quick contrition to be the result, in part, of superstitious fear. Very rarely is spiritual concern quite pure. In general it is the consequences of transgression rather than the evil of it that press on the

minds of men. Forebodings of trouble and calamity are more commonly causes of sorrow than the loss of fellowship with God; and if we know this to be the case with many who are convicted of sin under the preaching of the gospel, we cannot wonder to find the penitence of old Hebrew times mingled with superstition. Nevertheless, the people are aware of the broken covenant, burdened with a sense that they have lost the favour of their unseen Guide. There can be no doubt that the realization of sin and of justice turned against them is one cause of their tears.

Here, again, if there is a difference between Israel and Christian nations, it is not in favour of the latter. Are modern senates ever overcome by conviction of sin? Those who are in power seem to have no fear that they may do wrong. Glorifying their blunders and forgetting their errors, they find no occasion for self-reproach, no need to sit in sackcloth and ashes. Now and then, indeed, a day of fasting and humiliation is ordered and observed in state; the sincere Christian for his part feeling how miserably formal it is, how far from the spontaneous expression of abasement and remorse. God is called upon to help a people who have not considered their ways, who design no amendment, who have not even suspected that the Divine blessing may come in still further humbling. And turning to private life, is there not as much of self-justification, as little of real humility and faith? The shallow nature of popular Christianity is seen here, that so few can read in disappointment and privation anything but disaster, or submit without disgust and rebellion to take a lower place at the table of Providence. Our weeping is so often for what we longed to gain or wished to keep in the earthly and temporal region, so

seldom for what we have lost or should fear to lose in the spiritual. We grieve when we should rather rejoice that God has made us feel our need of Him, and called us again to our true blessedness.

The scene at Bochim connects itself very notably with one nine hundred and fifty years later. The poor fragments of the exiled tribes have been gathered again in the land of their fathers. They are rebuilding Jerusalem and the Temple. Ezra has led back a company from Babylon and has brought with him, by the favour of Artaxerxes, no small treasure of silver and gold for the house of God. To his astonishment and grief he hears the old tale of alliance with the inhabitants of the land, intermarriage even of Levites, priests and princes of Israel with women of the Canaanite races. In the new settlement of Palestine the error of the first is repeated. Ezra calls a solemn assembly in the Temple court—"every one that trembles at the words of the God of Israel." Till the evening sacrifice he sits prostrate with grief, his garment rent, his hair torn and dishevelled. Then on his knees before the Lord he spreads forth his hands in prayer. The trespasses of a thousand years afflict him, afflict the faithful. "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, shall we again break Thy commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? wouldest not Thou be angry with us till Thou hadst consumed us so that there should be no remnant nor any to escape? . . . Behold we are before Thee in our guiltiness; for none can stand before Thee because of this." The impressive lament of Ezra and those who join in his confessions draws together a great congregation, and the people weep very sore.

Nine centuries and a half appear a long time in the history of a nation. What has been gained during the period? Is the weeping at Jerusalem in Ezra's time, like the weeping at Bochim, a mark of no deeper feeling, no keener penitence? Has there been religious advance commensurate with the discipline of suffering, defeat, slaughter and exile, dishonoured kings, a wasted land? Have the prophets not achieved anything? Has not the Temple in its glory, in its desolation, spoken of a Heavenly power, a Divine rule, the sense of which entering the souls of the people has established piety, or at least a habit of separateness from heathen manners and life? It may be hard to distinguish and set forth the gain of those centuries. But it is certain that while the weeping at Bochim was the sign of a fear that soon passed away, the weeping in the Temple court marked a new beginning in Hebrew history. By the strong action of Ezra and Nehemiah the mixed marriages were dissolved, and from that time the Jewish people became, as they never were before, exclusive and separate. Where nature would have led the nation ceased to go. More and more strictly the law was enforced; the age of puritanism began. So, let us say, the sore discipline had its fruit.

And yet it is with a reservation only we can enjoy the success of those reformers who drew the sharp line between Israel and his heathen neighbours, between Jew and Gentile. The vehemence of reaction urged the nation towards another error—Pharisaism. Nothing could be purer, nothing nobler than the desire to make Israel a holy people. But to inspire men with religious zeal and yet preserve them from spiritual pride is always difficult, and in truth those Hebrew reformers did not see the danger. There came to be, in the

new development of faith, zeal enough, jealousy enough, for the purity of religion and life, but along with these a contempt for the heathen, a fierce enmity towards the uncircumcised, which made the interval till Christ appeared a time of strife and bloodshed worse than any that had been before. From the beginning the Hebrews were called with a holy calling, and their future was bound up with their faithfulness to it. Their ideal was to be earnest and pure, without bitterness or vainglory; and that is still the ideal of faith. But the Jewish people like ourselves, weak through the flesh, came short of the mark on one side or passed beyond it on the other. During the long period from Joshua to Nehemiah there was too little heat, and then a fire was kindled which burned a sharp narrow path, along which the life of Israel has gone with ever-lessening spiritual force. The unfulfilled ideal still waits, the unique destiny of this people of God still bears them on.

Bochim is a symbol. There the people wept for a transgression but half understood and a peril they could not rightly dread. There was genuine sorrow, there was genuine alarm. But it was the prophetic word, not personal experience, that moved the assembly. And as at Florence, when Savonarola's word, shaking with alarm a people who had no vision of holiness, left them morally weaker as it fell into silence, so the weeping at Bochim passed like a tempest that has bowed and broken the forest trees. The chiefs of Israel returned to their settlements with a new sense of duty and peril; but Canaanite civilization had attractions, Canaanite women a refinement which captivated the heart. And the civilization, the refinement, were associated with idolatry. The myths of Canaan, the poetry of Tammuz

and Astarte, were fascinating and seductive. We wonder not that the pure faith of God was corrupted, but that it survived. In Egypt the heathen worship was in a foreign tongue, but in Canaan the stories of the gods were whispered to Israelites in a language they knew, by their own kith and kin. In many a home among the mountains of Ephraim or the skirts of Lebanon the pagan wife, with her superstitious fears, her dread of the anger of this god or that goddess, wrought so on the mind of the Jewish husband that he began to feel her dread and then to permit and share her sacrifices. Thus idolatry invaded Israel, and the long and weary struggle between truth and falsehood began.

We have spoken of Bochim as a symbol, and to us it may be the symbol of this, that the very thing which men put from them in horror and with tears, seeing the evil, the danger of it, does often insinuate itself into their lives. The messenger is heard, and while he speaks how near God is, how awful is the sense of His being! A thrill of keen feeling passes from soul to soul. There are some in the gathering who have more spiritual insight than the rest, and their presence raises the heat of emotion. But the moment of revelation and of fervour passes, the company breaks up, and very soon those who have won no vision of holiness, who have only feared as they entered into the cloud, are in the common world again. The finer strings of the soul were made to thrill, the conscience was touched; but if the will has not been braced, if the man's reason and resoluteness are not engaged by a new conception of life, the earthly will resume control and God will be less known than before. So there are many cast down to-day, crying to God in trouble of

soul for evil done or evil which they are tempted to do, who to-morrow among the Canaanites will see things in another light. A man cannot be a recluse. He must mingle in business and in society with those who deride the thoughts that have moved him and laugh at his seriousness. The impulse to something better soon exhausts itself in this cold atmosphere. He turns upon his own emotion with contempt. The words that came with Divine urgency, the man whose face was like that of an angel of God, are already subjects of uneasy jesting, will soon be thrust from memory. Over the interlude of superficial anxiety the mind goes back to its old haunts, its old plans and cravings. The religious teacher, while he is often in no way responsible for this sad recoil, should yet be ever on his guard against the risk of weakening the moral fibre, of leaving men as Christ never left them, flaccid and infirm.

Again, there are cases that belong not to the history of a day, but to the history of a life. One may say, when he hears the strangely tempting voices that whisper in the twilight streets, "Am I a dog that from the holy traditions of my people and country I should fall away to these?" At first he flies the distasteful entreaty of the new nature-cult, its fleshly art and song, its nefarious science. But the voices are persistent. It is the perfecting of man and woman to which they invite. It is not vice but freedom, brightness, life and the courage to enjoy it they cunningly propose. There is not much of sweetness; the voices rise, they become stringent and overbearing. If the man would not be a fool, would not lose the good of the age into which he is born, he will be done with unnatural restraints, the bondage of purity. Thus

entreaty passes into mastery. Here is truth; there also seems to be fact. Little by little the subtle argument is so advanced that the degradation once feared is no longer to be seen. It is progress now; it is full development, the assertion of power and privilege, that the soul anticipates. How fatal is the lure, how treacherous the vision, the man discovers when he has parted with that which even through deepest penitence he may never regain. People are denying, and it has to be reasserted that there is a covenant which the soul of man has to keep with God. The thought is "archaic," and they would banish it. But it stands the great reality for man; and to keep that covenant in the grace of the Divine Spirit, in the love of the holiest, in the sacred manliness learned of Christ, is the only way to the broad daylight and the free summits of life. How can nature be a saviour? The suggestion is childish. Nature, as we all know, allows the hypocrite, the swindler, the traitor, as well as the brave, honest man, the pure, sweet woman. Is it said that man has a covenant with nature? On the temporal and prudential side of his activities that is true. He has relations with nature which must be apprehended, must be wisely realised. But the spiritual kingdom to which he belongs requires a wider outlook, loftier aims and hopes. The efforts demanded by nature have to be brought into harmony with those diviner aspirations. Man is bound to be prudent, brave, wise for eternity. He is warned of his own sin and urged to fly from it. This is the covenant with God which is wrought into the very constitution of his moral being.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the scene at Bochim and the words which moved the assembly to

tears had no lasting effect whatever. The history deals with outstanding facts of the national development. We hear chiefly of heroes and their deeds, but we shall not doubt that there were minds which kept the glow of truth and the consecration of penitential tears. The best lives of the people moved quietly on, apart from the commotions and strifes of the time. Rarely are the great political names even of a religious community those of holy and devout men, and, undoubtedly, this was true of Israel in the time of the judges. If we were to reckon only by those who appear conspicuously in these pages, we should have to wonder how the spiritual strain of thought and feeling survived. But it did survive; it gained in clearness and force. There were those in every tribe who kept alive the sacred traditions of Sinai and the desert, and Levites throughout the land did much to maintain among the people the worship of God. The great names of Abraham and Moses, the story of their faith and deeds, were the text of many an impressive lesson. So the light of piety did not go out; Jehovah was ever the Friend of Israel, even in its darkest day, for in the heart of the nation there never ceased to be a faithful remnant maintaining the fear and obedience of the Holy Name.

IV.

AMONG THE ROCKS OF PAGANISM.

JUDGES ii. 7-23.

"AND Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, on the north of the mountain of Gaash." So, long after the age of Joshua, the historian tells again how Israel lamented its great chief, and he seems to feel even more than did the people of the time the pathos and significance of the event. How much a man of God has been to his generation those rarely know who stand beside his grave. Through faith in him faith in the Eternal has been sustained, many who have a certain piety of their own depending, more than they have been aware, upon their contact with him. A glow went from him which insensibly raised to something like religious warmth souls that apart from such an influence would have been of the world worldly. Joshua succeeded Moses as the mediator of the covenant. He was the living witness of all that had been done in the Exodus and at Sinai. So long as he continued with Israel, even in the feebleness of old age, appearing, and no more, a venerable figure in the council of the tribes, there was a representative of Divine order, one who testified to

the promises of God and the duty of His people. The elders who outlived him were not men like himself, for they added nothing to faith; yet they preserved the idea at least of the theocracy, and when they passed away the period of Israel's robust youth was at an end. It is this the historian perceives, and his review of the following age in the passage we are now to consider is darkened throughout by the cloudy and troubled atmosphere that overcame the fresh morning of faith.

We know the great design that should have made Israel a singular and triumphant example to the nations of the world. The body politic was to have its unity in no elected government, in no hereditary ruler, but in the law and worship of its Divine King, sustained by the ministry of priest and prophet. Every tribe, every family, every soul was to be equally and directly subject to the Holy Will as expressed in the law and by the oracles of the sanctuary. The idea was that order should be maintained and the life of the tribes should go on under the pressure of the unseen Hand, never resisted, never shaken off, and full of bounty always to a trustful and obedient people. There might be times when the head men of tribes and families should have to come together in council, but it would be only to discover speedily and carry out with one accord the purpose of Jehovah. Rightly do we regard this as an inspired vision; it is at once simple and majestic. When a nation can so live and order its affairs it will have solved the great problem of government still exercising every civilized community. The Hebrews never realized the theocracy, and at the time of the settlement in Canaan they came far short of understanding it. "Israel had as yet scarcely found time to imbue its spirit deeply with the great truths which

had been awakened into life in it, and thus to appropriate them as an invaluable possession: the vital principle of that religion and nationality by which it had so wondrously triumphed was still scarcely understood when it was led into manifold severe trials."[1] Thus, while Hebrew history presents for the most part the aspect of an impetuous river broken and jarred by rocks and boulders, rarely settling into a calm expanse of mirror-like water, during the period of the judges the stream is seen almost arrested in the difficult country through which it has to force its way. It is divided by many a crag and often hidden for considerable stretches by overhanging cliffs. It plunges in cataracts and foams hotly in cauldrons of hollowed rock. Not till Samuel appears is there anything like success for this nation, which is of no account if not earnestly religious, and never is religious without a stern and capable chief, at once prophet and judge, a leader in worship and a restorer of order and unity among the tribes.

The general survey or preface which we have before us gives but one account of the disasters that befell the Hebrew people—they "followed other gods, and provoked the Lord to anger." And the reason of this has to be considered. Taking a natural view of the circumstances we might pronounce it almost impossible for the tribes to maintain their unity when they were fighting, each in its own district, against powerful enemies. It seems by no means wonderful that nature had its way, and that, weary of war, the people tended to seek rest in friendly intercourse and alliance with their neighbours. Were Judah and Simeon always to

[1] Ewald.

fight, though their own territory was secure? Was Ephraim to be the constant champion of the weaker tribes and never settle down to till the land? It was almost more than could be expected of men who had the common amount of selfishness. Occasionally, when all were threatened, there was a combination of the scattered clans, but for the most part each had to fight its own battle, and so the unity of life and faith was broken. Nor can we marvel at the neglect of worship and the falling away from Jehovah when we find so many who have been always surrounded by Christian influences drifting into a strange unconcern as to religious obligation and privilege. The writer of the Book of Judges, however, regards things from the standpoint of a high Divine ideal—the calling and duty of a God-made nation. Men are apt to frame excuses for themselves and each other; this historian makes no excuses. Where we might speak compassionately he speaks in sternness. He is bound to tell the story from God's side, and from God's side he tells it with puritan directness. In a sense it might go sorely against the grain to speak of his ancestors as sinning grievously and meriting condign punishment. But later generations needed to hear the truth, and he would utter it without evasion. It is surely Nathan, or some other prophet of Samuel's line, who lays bare with such faithfulness the infidelity of Israel. He is writing for the men of his own time and also for men who are to come; he is writing for us, and his main theme is the stern justice of Jehovah's government. God bestows privileges which men must value and use, or they shall suffer. When He declares Himself and gives His law, let the people see to it; let them encourage and constrain each other to obey. Disobedience brings unfailing

penalty. This is the spirit of the passage we are considering. Israel is God's possession, and is bound to be faithful. There is no Lord but Jehovah, and it is unpardonable for any Israelite to turn aside and worship a false God. The pressure of circumstances, often made much of, is not considered for a moment. The weakness of human nature, the temptations to which men and women are exposed, are not taken into account. Was there little faith, little spirituality? Every soul had its own responsibility for the decay, since to every Israelite Jehovah had revealed His love and addressed His call. Inexorable therefore was the demand for obedience. Religion is stern because reasonable, not an impossible service as easy human nature would fain prove it. If men disbelieve they incur doom, and it must fall upon them.

Joshua and his generation having been gathered unto their fathers, "there arose another generation which knew not the Lord, nor yet the work which He had wrought for Israel. And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, and served the Baalim." How common is the fall traced in these brief, stern words, the wasting of a sacred testimony that seemed to be deeply graven upon the heart of a race! The fathers felt and knew; the sons have only traditional knowledge and it never takes hold of them. The link of faith between one generation and another is not strongly forged; the most convincing proofs of God are not recounted. Here is a man who has learned his own weakness, who has drained a bitter cup of discipline—how can he better serve his sons than by telling them the story of his own mistakes and sins, his own suffering and repentance? Here is one

who in dark and trying times has found solace and strength and has been lifted out of horror and despair by the merciful hand of God—how can he do a father's part without telling his children of his defeats and deliverance, the extremity to which he was reduced and the restoring grace of Christ? But men hide their weaknesses, and are ashamed to confess that they ever passed through the Valley of Humiliation. They leave their own children unwarned to fall into the sloughs in which themselves were well-nigh swallowed up. Even when they have erected some Ebenezer, some monument of Divine succour, they often fail to bring their children to the spot, and speak to them there with fervent recollection of the goodness of the Lord. Was Solomon when a boy led by David to the town of Gath, and told by him the story of his cowardly fear, and how he fled from the face of Saul to seek refuge among Philistines? Was Absalom in his youth ever taken to the plains of Bethlehem and shown where his father fed the flocks, a poor shepherd lad, when the prophet sent for him to be anointed the coming King of Israel? Had these young princes learned in frank conversation with their father all he had to tell of temptation and transgression, of danger and redemption, perhaps the one would never have gone astray in his pride nor the other died a rebel in that wood of Ephraim. The Israelitish fathers were like many fathers still, they left the minds of their boys and girls uninstructed in life, uninstructed in the providence of God, and this in open neglect of the law which marked out their duty for them with clear injunction, recalling the themes and incidents on which they were to dwell.

One passage in the history of the past must have

been vividly before the minds of those who crossed the Jordan under Joshua, and should have stood a protest and warning against the idolatry into which families so easily lapsed throughout the land. Over at Shittim, when Israel lay encamped on the skirts of the mountains of Moab, a terrible sentence of Moses had fallen like a thunderbolt. On some high place near the camp a festival of Midianitish idolatry, licentious in the extreme, attracted great numbers of Hebrews; they went astray after the worst fashion of paganism, and the nation was polluted in the idolatrous orgies. Then Moses gave judgment—"Take the heads of the people and hang them up before the Lord, against the sun." And while that hideous row of stakes, each bearing the transfixed body of a guilty chief, witnessed in the face of the sun for the Divine ordinance of purity, there fell a plague that carried off twenty-four thousand of the transgressors. Was that forgotten? Did the terrible punishment of those who sinned in the matter of Baal-peor not haunt the memories of men when they entered the land of Baal-worship? No: like others, they were able to forget. Human nature is facile, and from a great horror of judgment can turn in quick recovery of the usual ease and confidence. Men have been in the valley of the shadow of death, where the mouth of hell is; they have barely escaped; but when they return upon it from another side they do not recognize the landmarks nor feel the need of being on their guard. They teach their children many things, but neglect to make them aware of that right-seeming way the end whereof are the ways of death.

The worship of the Baalim and Ashtaroth and the place which this came to have in Hebrew life require

our attention here. Canaan had for long been more or less subject to the influence of Chaldea and Egypt, and "had received the imprint of their religious ideas. The fish-god of Babylon reappears at Ascalon in the form of Dagon, the name of the goddess Astarte and her character seem to be adapted from the Babylonian Ishtar. Perhaps these divinities were introduced at a time when part of the Canaanite tribes lived on the borders of the Persian Gulf, in daily contact with the inhabitants of Chaldea."[1] The Egyptian Isis and Osiris, again, are closely connected with the Tammuz and Astarte worshipped in Phœnicia. In a general way it may be said that all the races inhabiting Syria had the same religion, but "each tribe, each people, each town had its Lord, its Master, its Baal, designated by a particular title for distinction from the masters or Baals of neighbouring cities. The gods adored at Tyre and Sidon were called Baal-Sur, the Master of Tyre; Baal-Sidon, the Master of Sidon. The highest among them, those that impersonated in its purity the conception of heavenly fire, were called kings of the gods. El or Kronos reigned at Byblos; Chemosh among the Moabites; Amman among the children of Ammon; Soutkhu among the Hittites." Melcarth, the Baal of the world of death, was the Master of Tyre. Each Baal was associated with a female divinity, who was the mistress of the town, the queen of the heavens. The common name of these goddesses was Astarte. There was an Ashtoreth of Chemosh among the Moabites. The Ashtoreth of the Hittites was called Tanit. There was an Ashtoreth Karnaim or Horned, so called with reference to the crescent moon; and

[1] Maspero.

another was Ashtoreth Naamah, the good Astarte. In short, a special Astarte could be created by any town and named by any fancy, and Baals were multiplied in the same way. It is, therefore, impossible to assign any distinct character to these inventions. The Baalim mostly represented forces of nature—the sun, the stars. The Astartes presided over love, birth, the different seasons of the year, and—war. "The multitude of secondary Baalim and Ashtaroth tended to resolve themselves into a single supreme pair, in comparison with whom the others had little more than a shadowy existence." As the sun and moon outshine all the other heavenly bodies, so two principal deities representing them were supreme.

The worship connected with this horde of fanciful beings is well known to have merited the strongest language of detestation applied to it by the Hebrew prophets. The ceremonies were a strange and degrading blend of the licentious and the cruel, notorious even in a time of gross and hideous rites. The Baalim were supposed to have a fierce and envious disposition, imperiously demanding the torture and death not only of animals but of men. The horrible notion had taken root that in times of public danger king and nobles must sacrifice their children in fire for the pleasure of the god. And while nothing of this sort was done for the Ashtaroth their demands were in one aspect even more vile. Self-mutilation, self-defilement were acts of worship, and in the great festivals men and women gave themselves up to debauchery which cannot be described. No doubt some of the observances of this paganism were mild and simple. Feasts there were at the seasons of reaping and vintage which were of a bright and comparatively harmless character; and

it was by taking part in these that Hebrew families began their acquaintance with the heathenism of the country. But the tendency of polytheism is ever downward. It springs from a curious and ignorant dwelling on the mysterious processes of nature, untamed fancy personifying the causes of all that is strange and horrible, constantly wandering therefore into more grotesque and lawless dreams of unseen powers and their claims on man. The imagination of the worshipper, which passes beyond his power of action, attributes to the gods energy more vehement, desires more sweeping, anger more dreadful than he finds in himself. He thinks of beings who are strong in appetite and will and yet under no restraint or responsibility. In the beginning polytheism is not necessarily vile and cruel; but it must become so as it develops. The minds by whose fancies the gods are created and furnished with adventures are able to conceive characters vehemently cruel, wildly capricious and impure. But how can they imagine a character great in wisdom, holiness and justice? The additions of fable and belief made from age to age may hold in solution some elements that are good, some of man's yearning for the noble and true beyond him. The better strain, however, is overborne in popular talk and custom by the tendency to fear rather than to hope in presence of unknown powers, the necessity which is felt to avert possible anger of the gods or make sure of their patronage. Sacrifices are multiplied, the offerer exerting himself more and more to gain his main point at whatever expense; while he thinks of the world of gods as a region in which there is jealousy of man's respect and a multitude of rival claims all of which must be met. Thus the whole moral atmosphere is thrown into confusion.

Into a polytheism of this kind came Israel, to whom had been committed a revelation of the one true God, and in the first moment of homage at heathen altars the people lost the secret of its strength. Certainly Jehovah was not abandoned; He was thought of still as the Lord of Israel. But He was now one among many who had their rights and could repay the fervent worshipper. At one high-place it was Jehovah men sought, at another the Baal of the hill and his Ashtoreth. Yet Jehovah was still the special patron of the Hebrew tribes and of no others, and in trouble they turned to Him for relief. So in the midst of mythology Divine faith had to struggle for existence. The stone pillars which the Israelites erected were mostly to the name of God, but Hebrews danced with Hittite and Jebusite around the poles of Astarte, and in revels of nature-worship they forgot their holy traditions, lost their vigour of body and soul. The doom of apostasy fulfilled itself. They were unable to stand before their enemies. "The hand of the Lord was against them for evil, and they were greatly distressed."

And why could not Israel rest in the debasement of idolatry? Why did not the Hebrews abandon their distinct mission as a nation and mingle with the races they came to convert or drive away? They could not rest; they could not mingle and forget. Is there ever peace in the soul of a man who falls from early impressions of good to join the licentious and the profane? He has still his own personality, shot through with recollections of youth and traits inherited from godly ancestors. It is impossible for him to be at one with his new companions in their revelry and vice. He finds that from which his souls revolts, he feels disgust

which he has to overcome by a strong effort of perverted will. He despises his associates and knows in his inmost heart that he is of a different race. Worse he may become than they, but he is never the same. So was it in the degradation of the Israelites, both individually and as a nation. From complete absorption among the peoples of Canaan they were preserved by hereditary influences which were part of their very life, by holy thoughts and hopes embodied in their national history, by the rags of that conscience which remained from the law-giving of Moses and the discipline of the wilderness. Moreover, akin as they were to the idolatrous races, they had a feeling of closer kinship with each other, tribe with tribe, family with family; and the worship of God at the little-frequented shrine still maintained the shadow at least of the national consecration. They were a people apart, these Beni-Israel, a people of higher rank than Amorites or Perizzites, Hittites or Phœnicians. Even when least alive to their destiny they were still held by it, led on secretly by that heavenly hand which never let them go. From time to time souls were born among them aglow with devout eagerness, confident in the faith of God. The tribes were roused out of lethargy by voices that woke many recollections of half-forgotten purpose and hope. Now from Judah in the south, now from Ephraim in the centre, now from Dan or Gilead a cry was raised. For a time at least manhood was quickened, national feeling became keen, the old faith was partly revived, and God had again a witness in His people.

We have found the writer of the Book of Judges consistent and unfaltering in his condemnation of Israel; he is queally consistent and eager in his vindication of

God. It is to him no doubtful thing, but an assured fact, that the Holy One came with Israel from Paran and marched with the people from Seir. He has no hesitation in ascribing to Divine providence and grace the deeds of those men who go by the name of judges. It startles and even confounds some to note the plain direct terms in which God is made, so to speak, responsible for those rude warriors whose exploits we are to review,—for Ehud, for Jephthah, for Samson. The men are children of their age, vehement, often reckless, not answering to the Christian ideal of heroism. They do rough work in a rough way. If we found their history elsewhere than in the Bible we should be disposed to class them with the Roman Horatius, the Saxon Hereward, the Jutes Hengest and Horsa and hardly dare to call them men of God's hand. But here they are presented bearing the stamp of a Divine vocation; and in the New Testament it is emphatically reaffirmed. "What shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; . . . . who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, ... waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens."

There is a crude religious sentimentalism to which the Bible gives no countenance. Where we, mistaking the meaning of providence because we do not rightly believe in immortality, are apt to think with horror of the miseries of men, the vigorous veracity of sacred writers directs our thought to the moral issues of life and the vast movements of God's purifying design. Where we, ignorant of much that goes to the making of a world, lament the seeming confusion and the errors, the Bible seer discerns that the cup of red wine poured out is in the hand of Almighty Justice and

Wisdom. It is of a piece with the superficial feeling of modern society to doubt whether God could have any share in the deeds of Jephthah and the career of Samson, whether these could have any place in the Divine order. Look at Christ and His infinite compassion, it is said; read that God is love, and then reconcile if you can this view of His character with the idea which makes Barak and Gideon His ministers. Out of all such perplexities there is a straight way. You make light of moral evil and individual responsibility when you say that this war or that pestilence has no Divine mission. You deny eternal righteousness when you question whether a man, vindicating it in the time-sphere, can have a Divine vocation. The man is but a human instrument. True. He is not perfect, he is not even spiritual. True. Yet if there is in him a gleam of right and earnest purpose, if he stands above his time in virtue of an inward light which shows him but a single truth, and in the spirit of that strikes his blow—is it to be denied that within his limits he is a weapon of the holiest Providence, a helper of eternal grace?

The storm, the pestilence have a providential errand. They urge men to prudence and effort; they prevent communities from settling on their lees. But the hero has a higher range of usefulness. It is not mere prudence he represents, but the passion for justice. For right against might, for liberty against oppression he contends, and in striking his blow he compels his generation to take into account morality and the will of God. He may not see far, but at least he stirs inquiry as to the right way, and though thousands die in the conflict he awakens there is a real gain which the coming age inherits. Such a one, however faulty

however, as we may say, earthly, is yet far above mere earthly levels. His moral concepts may be poor and low compared with ours; but the heat that moves him is not of sense, not of clay. Obstructed it is by the ignorance and sin of our human estate, nevertheless it is a supernatural power, and so far as it works in any degree for righteousness, freedom, the realization of God, the man is a hero of faith.

We do not affirm here that God approves or inspires all that is done by the leaders of a suffering people in the way of vindicating what they deem their rights. Moreover, there are claims and rights so-called for which it is impious to shed a drop of blood. But if the state of humanity is such that the Son of God must die for it, is there any room to wonder that men have to die for it? Given a cause like that of Israel, a need of the whole world which Israel only could meet, and the men who unselfishly, at the risk of death, did their part in the front of the struggle which that cause and that need demanded, though they slew their thousands, were not men of whom the Christian teacher needs be afraid to speak. And there have been many such in all nations, for the principle by which we judge is of the broadest application,—men who have led the forlorn hopes of nations, driven back the march of tyrants, given law and order to an unsettled land.

Judge after judge was "raised up"—the word is true—and rallied the tribes of Israel, and while each lived there were renewed energy and prosperity. But the moral revival was never in the deeps of life and no deliverance was permanent. It is only a faithful nation that can use freedom. Neither trouble nor release from trouble will certainly make either a man or a people steadily true to the best. Unless there is along with

trouble a conviction of spiritual need and failure, men will forget the prayers and vows they made in their extremity. Thus in the history of Israel, as in the history of many a soul, periods of suffering and of prosperity succeed each other and there is no distinct growth of the religious life. All these experiences are meant to throw men back upon the seriousness of duty, and the great purpose God has in their existence. We must repent not because we are in pain or grief, but because we are estranged from the Holy One and have denied the God of Salvation. Until the soul comes to this it only struggles out of one pit to fall into another.

V.

THE ARM OF ARAM AND OF OTHNIEL.

JUDGES iii. 1-11.

WE come now to a statement of no small importance, which may be the cause of some perplexity. It is emphatically affirmed that God fulfilled His design for Israel by leaving around it in Canaan a circle of vigorous tribes very unlike each other, but alike in this, that each presented to the Hebrews a civilisation from which something might be learned but much had to be dreaded, a seductive form of paganism which ought to have been entirely resisted, an aggressive energy fitted to rouse their national feeling. We learn that Israel was led along a course of development resembling that by which other nations have advanced to unity and strength. As the Divine plan is unfolded, it is seen that not by undivided possession of the Promised Land, not by swift and fierce clearing away of opponents, was Israel to reach its glory and become Jehovah's witness, but in the way of patient fidelity amidst temptations, by long struggle and arduous discipline. And why should this cause perplexity? If moral education did not move on the same line for all peoples in every age, then indeed mankind would be put to intellectual confusion. There was never any other way for Israel than for the rest of the world.

"These are the nations which the Lord left to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord." The first-named are the Philistines, whose settlements on the coast-plain toward Egypt were growing in power. They were a maritime race, apparently much like the Danish invaders of Saxon England, sea-rovers or pirates, ready for any fray that promised spoil. In the great coalition of peoples that fell on Egypt during the reign of Ramses III., about the year 1260 B.C., Philistines were conspicuous, and after the crushing defeat of the expedition they appear in larger numbers on the coast of Canaan. Their cities were military republics skilfully organized, each with a *seren* or war-chief, the chiefs of the hundred cities forming a council of federation. Their origin is not known; but we may suppose them to have been a branch of the Amorite family, who after a time of adventure were returning to their early haunts. It may be reckoned certain that in wealth and civilization they presented a marked contrast to the Israelites, and their equipments of all kinds gave them great advantage in the arts of war and peace. Even in the period of the Judges there were imposing temples in the Philistine cities and the worship must have been carefully ordered. How they compared with the Hebrews in domestic life we have no means of judging, but there was certainly some barrier of race, language, or custom between the peoples which made intermarriage very rare. We can suppose that they looked upon the Hebrews from their higher worldly level as rude and slavish. Military adventurers not unwilling to sell their services for gold would be apt to despise a race half-nomad, half-rural. It was in war, not in peace, that Philistine and Hebrew met, contempt on either

side gradually changing into keenest hatred as century after century the issue of battle was tried with varying success. And it must be said that it was well for the tribes of Jehovah rather to be in occasional subjection to the Philistines, and so learn to dread them, than to mix freely with those by whom the great ideas of Hebrew life were despised.

On the northward sea-board a quite different race, the Zidonians, or Phœnicians, were in one sense better neighbours to the Israelites, in another sense no better friends. While the Philistines were haughty, aristocratic, military, the Phœnicians were the great *bourgeoisie* of the period, clever, enterprising, eminently successful in trade. Like the other Canaanites and the ancestors of the Jews, they were probably immigrants from the lower Euphrates valley; unlike the others, they brought with them habits of commerce and skill in manufacture, for which they became famous along the Mediterranean shores and beyond the Pillars of Hercules. Between Philistine and Phœnician the Hebrew was mercifully protected from the absorbing interests of commercial life and the disgrace of prosperous piracy. The conscious superiority of the coast peoples in wealth and influence and the material elements of civilisation was itself a guard to the Jews, who had their own sense of dignity, their own claim to assert. The configuration of the country helped the separateness of Israel, especially so far as Phœnicia was concerned, which lay mainly beyond the rampart of Lebanon and the gorge of the Litâny; while with the fortress of Tyre on the hither side of the natural frontier there appears to have been for a long time no intercourse, probably on account of its peculiar position. But the spirit of Phœnicia was the great barrier.

Along the crowded wharves of Tyre and Zidon, in warehouses and markets, factories and workshops, a hundred industries were in full play, and in their luxurious dwellings the busy prosperous traders, with their silk-clad wives, enjoyed the pleasures of the age. From all this the Hebrew, rough and unkempt, felt himself shut out, perhaps with a touch of regret, perhaps with scorn equal to that on the other side. He had to live his life apart from that busy race, apart from its vivacity and enterprise, apart from its lubricity and worldliness. The contempt of the world is ill to bear, and the Jew no doubt found it so. But it was good for him. The tribes had time to consolidate, the religion of Jehovah became established before Phœnicia thought it worth while to court her neighbour. Early indeed the idolatry of the one people infected the other and there were the beginnings of trade, yet on the whole for many centuries they kept apart. Not till a king throned in Jerusalem could enter into alliance with a king of Tyre, crown with crown, did there come to be that intimacy which had so much risk for the Hebrew. The humbleness and poverty of Israel during the early centuries of its history in Canaan was a providential safeguard. God would not lose His people, nor suffer it to forget its mission.

Among the inland races with whom the Israelites are said to have dwelt, the Amorites, though mentioned along with Perizzites and Hivites, had very distinct characteristics. They were a mountain people like the Scottish Highlanders, even in physiognomy much resembling them, a tall, white-skinned, blue-eyed race. Warlike we know they were, and the Egyptian representation of the siege of Dapur by Ramses II. shows what is supposed to be the standard of the Amorites

on the highest tower, a shield pierced by three arrows surmounted by another arrow fastened across the top of the staff. On the east of Jordan they were defeated by the Israelites and their land between Arnon and Jabbok was allotted to Reuben and Gad. In the west they seem to have held their ground in isolated fortresses or small clans, so energetic and troublesome that it is specially noted in Samuel's time that a great defeat of the Philistines brought peace between Israel and the Amorites. A significant reference in the description of Ahab's idolatry—"he did very abominably in following idols according to all things as did the Amorites"—shows the religion of these people to have been Baal-worship of the grossest kind; and we may well suppose that by intermixture with them especially the faith of Israel was debased. Even now, it may be said, the Amorite is still in the land; a blue-eyed, fair-complexioned type survives, representing that ancient stock.

Passing some tribes whose names imply rather geographical than ethnical distinctions, we come to the Hittites, the powerful people of whom in recent years we have learned something. At one time these Hittites were practically masters of the wide region from Ephesus in the west of Asia Minor to Carchemish on the Euphrates, and from the shores of the Black Sea to the south of Palestine. They appear to us in the archives of Thebes and the poem of the Laureate, Pentaur, as the great adversaries of Egypt in the days of Ramses I. and his successors; and one of the most interesting records is of the battle fought about 1383 B.C. at Kadesh on the Orontes, between the immense armies of the two nations, the Egyptians being led by Ramses II. Amazing feats were attributed to Ramses, but he was

compelled to treat on equal terms with the "great king of Kheta," and the war was followed by a marriage between the Pharaoh and the daughter of the Hittite prince. Syria too was given up to the latter as his legitimate possession. The treaty of peace drawn up on the occasion, in the name of the chief gods of Egypt and of the Hittites, included a compact of offensive and defensive alliance and careful provisions for extradition of fugitives and criminals. Throughout it there is evident a great dependence upon the company of gods of either land, who are largely invoked to punish those who break and reward those who keep its terms. "He who shall observe these commandments which the silver tablet contains, whether he be of the people of Kheta or of the people of Egypt, because he has not neglected them, the company of the gods of the land of Kheta and the company of the gods of the land of Egypt shall secure his reward and preserve life for him and his servants."[1] From this time the Amorites of southern Palestine and the minor Canaanite peoples submitted to the Hittite dominion, and it was while this subjection lasted that the Israelites under Joshua appeared on the scene. There can be no doubt that the tremendous conflict with Egypt had exhausted the population of Canaan and wasted the country, and so prepared the way for the success of Israel. The Hittites indeed were strong enough had they seen fit to oppose with great armies the new comers into Syria. But the centre of their power lay far to the north, perhaps in Cappadocia; and on the frontier towards Nineveh they were engaged with more formidable opponents. We may also surmise that the Hittites,

[1] "The Hittites," by A. H. Sayce, LL.D., p. 36.

whose alliance with Egypt was by Joshua's time somewhat decayed, would look upon the Hebrews, to begin with, as fugitives from the misrule of the Pharaoh who might be counted upon to take arms against their former oppressors. This would account, in part at least, for the indifference with which the Israelite settlement in Canaan was regarded; it explains why no vigorous attempt was made to drive back the tribes.

For the characteristics of the Hittites, whose appearance and dress constantly suggest a Mongolian origin, we can now consult their monuments. A vigorous people they must have been, capable of government, of extensive organization, concerned to perfect their arts as well as to increase their power. Original contributors to civilization they probably were not, but they had skill to use what they found and spread it widely. Their worship of Sutekh or Soutkhu, and especially of Astarte under the name of Ma, who reappears in the Great Diana of Ephesus, must have been very elaborate. A single Cappadocian city is reported to have had at one time six thousand armed priestesses and eunuchs of that goddess. In Palestine there were not many of this distinct and energetic people when the Hebrews crossed the Jordan. A settlement seems to have remained about Hebron, but the armies had withdrawn; Kadesh on the Orontes was the nearest garrison. One peculiar institution of Hittite religion was the holy city, which afforded sanctuary to fugitives; and it is notable that some of these cities in Canaan, such as Kadesh-Naphtali and Hebron, are found among the Hebrew cities of refuge.

It was as a people at once enticed and threatened, invited to peace and constantly provoked to war, that Israel settled in the circle of Syrian nations. After the

first conflicts, ending in the defeat of Adoni-bezek and the capture of Hebron and Kiriath-sepher, the Hebrews had an acknowledged place, partly won by their prowess, partly by the terror of Jehovah which accompanied their arms. To Philistines, Phœnicians and Hittites, as we have seen, their coming mattered little, and the other races had to make the best of affairs, sometimes able to hold their ground, sometimes forced to give way. The Hebrew tribes, for their part, were, on the whole, too ready to live at peace and to yield not a little for the sake of peace. Intermarriages made their position safer, and they intermarried with Amorites, Hivites, Perizzites. Interchange of goods was profitable, and they engaged in barter. The observance of frontiers and covenants helped to make things smooth, and they agreed on boundary lines of territory and terms of fraternal intercourse. The acknowledgment of their neighbours' religion was the next thing, and from that they did not shrink. The new neighbours were practically superior to themselves in many ways, well-informed as to the soil, the climate, the methods of tillage necessary in the land, well able to teach useful arts and simple manufactures. Little by little the debasing notions and bad customs that infest pagan society entered Hebrew homes. Comfort and prosperity came; but comfort was dearly bought with loss of pureness, and prosperity with loss of faith. The watchwords of unity were forgotten by many. But for the sore oppressions of which the Mesopotamian was the first the tribes would have gradually lost all coherence and vigour and become like those poor tatters of races that dragged out an inglorious existence between Jordan and the Mediterranean plain.

Yet it is with nations as with men; those that have

a reason of existence and the desire to realize it, even at intervals, may fall away into pitiful languor if corrupted by prosperity, but when the need comes their spirit will be renewed. While Hivites, Perizzites and even Amorites had practically nothing to live for, but only cared to live, the Hebrews felt oppression and restraint in their inmost marrow. What the faithful servants of God among them urged in vain the iron heel of Cushan-rishathaim made them remember and realize that they had a God from Whom they were basely departing, a birthright they were selling for pottage. In Doubting Castle, under the chains of Despair, they bethought them of the Almighty and His ancient promises, they cried unto the Lord. And it was not the cry of an afflicted church; Israel was far from deserving that name. Rather was it the cry of a prodigal people scarcely daring to hope that the Father would forgive and save.

Nothing yet found in the records of Babylon or Assyria throws any light on the invasion of Cushan-rishathaim, whose name, which seems to mean Cushan of the Two Evil Deeds, may be taken to represent his character as the Hebrews viewed it. He was a king one of whose predecessors a few centuries before had given a daughter in marriage to the third Amenophis of Egypt, and with her the Aramæan religion to the Nile valley. At that time Mesopotamia, or Aram-Naharaim, was one of the greatest monarchies of western Asia. Stretching along the Euphrates from the Khabour river towards Carchemish and away to the highlands of Armenia, it embraced the district in which Terah and Abram first settled when the family migrated from Ur of the Chaldees. In the days of the judges of Israel, however, the glory of Aram had faded. The

Assyrians threatened its eastern frontier, and about 1325 B.C., the date at which we have now arrived, they laid waste the valley of the Khabour. We can suppose that the pressure of this rising empire was one cause of the expedition of Cushan towards the western sea.

It remains a question, however, why the Mesopotamian king should have been allowed to traverse the land of the Hittites, either by way of Damascus or the desert route that led past Tadmor, in order to fall on the Israelites; and there is this other question, What led him to think of attacking Israel especially among the dwellers in Canaan? In pursuing these inquiries we have at least presumption to guide us. Carchemish on the Euphrates was a great Hittite fortress commanding the fords of that deep and treacherous river. Not far from it, within the Mesopotamian country, was Pethor, which was at once a Hittite and an Aramæan town—Pethor the city of Balaam with whom the Hebrews had had to reckon shortly before they entered Canaan. Now Cushan-rishathaim, reigning in this region, occupied the middle ground between the Hittites and Assyria on the east, also between them and Babylon on the south-east; and it is probable that he was in close alliance with the Hittites. Suppose then that the Hittite king, who at first regarded the Hebrews with indifference, was now beginning to view them with distrust or to fear them as a people bent on their own ends, not to be reckoned on for help against Egypt, and we can easily see that he might be more than ready to assist the Mesopotamians in their attack on the tribes. To this we may add a hint which is derived from Balaam's connection with Pethor, and the kind of advice he was in the way of giving to those who consulted him. Does it not seem probable enough that

some counsel of his survived his death and now guided the action of the king of Aram? Balaam, by profession a soothsayer, was evidently a great political personage of his time, foreseeing, crafty and vindictive. Methods of his for suppressing Israel, the force of whose genius he fully recognised, were perhaps sold to more than one kingly employer. "The land of the children of his people" would almost certainly keep his counsel in mind and seek to avenge his death. Thus against Israel particularly among the dwellers in Canaan the arms of Cushan-rishathaim would be directed, and the Hittites, who scarcely found it needful to attack Israel for their own safety, would facilitate his march.

Here then we may trace the revival of a feud which seemed to have died away fifty years before. Neither nations nor men can easily escape from the enmity they have incurred and the entanglements of their history. When years have elapsed and strifes appear to have been buried in oblivion, suddenly, as if out of the grave, the past is apt to arise and confront us, sternly demanding the payment of its reckoning. We once did another grievous wrong, and now our fondly cherished belief that the man we injured had forgotten our injustice is completely dispelled. The old anxiety, the old terror breaks in afresh upon our lives. Or it was in doing our duty that we braved the enmity of evil-minded men and punished their crimes. But though they have passed away their bitter hatred bequeathed to others still survives. Now the battle of justice and fidelity has to be fought over again, and well is it for us if we are found ready in the strength of God.

And, in another aspect, how futile is the dream some indulge of getting rid of their history, passing beyond

the memory or resurrection of what has been. Shall Divine forgiveness obliterate those deeds of which we have repented? Then the deeds being forgotten the forgiveness too would pass into oblivion and all the gain of faith and gratitude it brought would be lost. Do we expect never to retrace in memory the way we have travelled? As well might we hope, retaining our personality, to become other men than we are. The past, good and evil, remains and will remain, that we may be kept humble and moved to ever-increasing thankfulness and fervour of soul. We rise "on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things," and every forgotten incident by which moral education has been provided for must return to light. The heaven we hope for is not to be one of forgetfulness, but a state bright and free through remembrance of the grace that saved us at every stage and the circumstances of our salvation. As yet we do not half know what God has done for us, what His providence has been. There must be a resurrection of old conflicts, strifes, defeats and victories in order that we may understand the grace which is to keep us safe for ever.

Attacked by Cushan of the Two Crimes the Israelites were in evil case. They had not the consciousness of Divine support which sustained them once. They had forsaken Him whose presence in the camp made their arms victorious. Now they must face the consequences of their fathers' deeds without their fathers' heavenly courage. Had they still been a united nation full of faith and hope, the armies of Aram would have assailed them in vain. But they were without the spirit which the crisis required. For eight years the northern tribes had to bear a sore oppression, soldiers quartered in their cities, tribute exacted at the point

of the sword, their harvests enjoyed by others. The stern lesson was taught them that Canaan was to be no peaceful habitation for a people that renounced the purpose of its existence. The struggle became more hopeless year by year, the state of affairs more wretched. So at last the tribes were driven by stress of persecution and calamity to call again on the name of God, and some faint hope of succour broke like a misty morning over the land.

It was from the far south that help came in response to the piteous cry of the oppressed in the north; the deliverer was Othniel, who has already appeared in the history. After his marriage with Achsah, daughter of Caleb, we must suppose him living as quietly as possible in his south-lying farm, there increasing in importance year by year till now he is a respected chief of the tribe of Judah. In frequent skirmishes with Arab marauders from the wilderness he has distinguished himself, maintaining the fame of his early exploit. Better still, he is one of those who have kept the great traditions of the nation, a man mindful of the law of God, deriving strength of character from fellowship with the Almighty. "The Spirit of Jehovah came upon him and he judged Israel; and he went out to war, and Jehovah delivered Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia into his hand."

"He judged Israel and went out to war." Significant is the order of these statements. The judging of Israel by this man, on whom the Spirit of Jehovah was, meant no doubt inquisition into the religious and moral state, condemnation of the idolatry of the tribes and a restoration to some extent of the worship of God. In no other way could the strength of Israel be revived. The people had to be healed before they could fight,

and the needed cure was spiritual. Hopeless invariably have been the efforts of oppressed peoples to deliver themselves unless some trust in a divine power has given them heart for the struggle. When we see an army bow in prayer as one man before joining battle, as the Swiss did at Morat and the Scots at Bannockburn, we have faith in their spirit and courage, for they are feeling their dependence in the Supernatural. Othniel's first care was to suppress idolatry, to teach Israelites anew the forgotten name and law of God and their destiny as a nation. Well did he know that this alone would prepare the way for success. Then, having gathered an army fit for his purpose, he was not long in sweeping the garrisons of Cushan out of the land.

Judgment and then deliverance; judgment of the mistakes and sins men have committed, thereby bringing themselves into trouble; conviction of sin and righteousness; thereafter guidance and help that their feet may be set on a rock and their goings established—this is the right sequence. That God should help the proud, the self-sufficient out of their troubles in order that they may go on in pride and vainglory, or that He should save the vicious from the consequences of their vice and leave them to persist in their iniquity, would be no Divine work. The new mind and the right spirit must be put in men, they must hear their condemnation, lay it to heart and repent, there must be a revival of holy purpose and aspiration first. Then the oppressors will be driven from the land, the weight of trouble lifted from the soul.

Othniel the first of the judges seems one of the best. He is not a man of mere rude strength and dashing enterprise. Nor is he one who runs the risk of sudden

elevation to power, which few can stand. A person of acknowledged honour and sagacity, he sees the problem of the time and does his best to solve it. He is almost unique in this, that he appears without offence, without shame. And his judgeship is honourable to Israel. It points to a higher level of thought and greater seriousness among the tribes than in the century when Jephthah and Samson were the acknowledged heroes. The nation had not lost its reverence for the great names and hopes of the exodus when it obeyed Othniel and followed him to battle.

In modern times there would seem to be scarcely any understanding of the fact that no man can do real service as a political leader unless he is a fearer of God, one who loves righteousness more than country, and serves the Eternal before any constituency. Sometimes a nation low enough in morality has been so far awake to its need and danger as to give the helm, at least for a time, to a servant of truth and righteousness and to follow where he leads. But more commonly is it the case that political leaders are chosen anywhere rather than from the ranks of the spiritually earnest. It is oratorical dash now, and now the cleverness of the intriguer, or the power of rank and wealth, that catches popular favour and exalts a man in the state. Members of parliament, cabinet ministers, high officials need have no devoutness, no spiritual seriousness or insight. A nation generally seeks no such character in its legislators and is often content with less than decent morality. Is it then any wonder that politics are arid and government a series of errors? We need men who have the true idea of liberty and will set nations nominally Christian on the way of fulfilling their mission to the world. When the people want a spiritual

leader he will appear; when they are ready to follow one of high and pure temper he will arise and show the way. But the plain truth is that our chiefs in the state, in society and business must be the men who represent the general opinion, the general aim. While we are in the main a worldly people, the best guides, those of spiritual mind, will never be allowed to carry their plans. And so we come back to the main lesson of the whole history, that only as each citizen is thoughtful of God and of duty, redeemed from selfishness and the world, can there be a true commonwealth, honourable government, beneficent civilization.

VI.

THE DAGGER AND THE OX-GOAD.

JUDGES iii. 12-31.

THE world is served by men of very diverse kinds, and we pass now to one who is in strong contrast to Israel's first deliverer. Othniel the judge without reproach is followed by Ehud the regicide. The long peace which the country enjoyed after the Mesopotamian army was driven out allowed a return of prosperity and with it a relaxing of spiritual tone. Again there was disorganization; again the Hebrew strength decayed and watchful enemies found an opportunity. The Moabites led the attack, and their king was at the head of a federation including the Ammonites and the Amalekites. It was this coalition the power of which Ehud had to break.

We can only surmise the causes of the assault made on the Hebrews west of Jordan by those peoples on the east. When the Israelites first appeared on the plains of the Jordan under the shadow of the mountains of Moab, before crossing into Palestine proper, Balak king of Moab viewed with alarm this new nation which was advancing to seek a settlement so near his territory. It was then he sent to Pethor for Balaam, in the hope that by a powerful incantation or curse the great diviner would blight the Hebrew armies and

make them an easy prey. Notwithstanding this scheme, which even to the Israelites did not appear contemptible, Moses so far respected the relationship between Moab and Israel that he did not attack Balak's kingdom, although at the time it had been weakened by an unsuccessful contest with the Amorites from Gilead. Moab to the south and Ammon to the north were both left unharmed.

But to Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh was allotted the land from which the Amorites had been completely driven, a region extending from the frontier of Moab on the south away towards Hermon and the Argob ; and these tribes entering vigorously on their possession could not long remain at peace with the bordering races. We can easily see how their encroachments, their growing strength would vex Moab and Ammon and drive them to plans of retaliation. Balaam had not cursed Israel ; he had blessed it, and the blessing was being fulfilled. It seemed to be decreed that all other peoples east of Jordan were to be overborne by the descendants of Abraham ; yet one fear wrought against another, and the hour of Israel's security was seized as a fit occasion for a vigorous sally across the river. A desperate effort was made to strike at the heart of the Hebrew power and assert the claims of Chemosh to be a greater god than He Who was reverenced at the sanctuary of the ark.

Or Amalek may have instigated the attack. Away in the Sinaitic wilderness there stood an altar which Moses had named Jehovah-Nissi, Jehovah is my banner, and that altar commemorated a great victory gained by Israel over the Amalekites. The greater part of a century had gone by since the battle, but the memory of defeat lingers long with the Arab—and

these Amalekites were pure Arabs, savage, vindictive, cherishing their cause of war, waiting their revenge. We know the command in Deuteronomy, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt. How he met thee by the way and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee. Thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. Thou shalt not forget it." We may be sure that Reuben and Gad did not forget the dastardly attack; we may be sure that Amalek did not forget the day of Rephidim. If Moab was not of itself disposed to cross the Jordan and fall on Benjamin and Ephraim, there was the urgency of Amalek, the proffered help of that fiery people to ripen decision. The ferment of war rose. Moab, having walled cities to form a basis of operations, took the lead. The confederates marched northward along the Dead Sea, seized the ford near Gilgal and mastering the plain of Jericho pushed their conquest beyond the hills. Nor was it a temporary advance. They established themselves. Eighteen years afterwards we find Eglon, in his palace or castle near the City of Palm Trees, claiming authority over all Israel.

So the Hebrew tribes, partly by reason of an old strife not forgotten, partly because they have gone on vigorously adding to their territory, again suffer assault and are brought under oppression, and the coalition against them reminds us of confederacies that are in full force to-day. Ammon and Moab are united against the church of Christ, and Amalek joins in the attack. The parable is one, we shall say, of the opposition the church is constantly provoking, constantly experiencing, not entirely to its own credit. Allowing that, in the main, Christainity is truly and honestly aggressive, that

on its march to the heights it does straight battle with the enemies of mankind and thus awakens the hatred of bandit Amaleks, yet this is not a complete account of the assaults which are renewed century after century. Must it not be owned that those who pass for Christians often go beyond the lines and methods of their proper warfare and are found on fields where the weapons are carnal and the fight is not "the good fight of faith"? There is a strain of modern talk which defends the worldly ambition of Christian men, sounding very hollow and insincere to all excepting those whose interest and illusion it is to think it heavenly. We hear from a thousand tongues the gospel of Christianized commerce, of sanctified success, of making business a religion. In the press and hurry of competition there is a less and a greater conscientiousness. Let men have it in the greater degree, let them be less anxious for speedy success than some they know, not quite so eager to add factory to factory and field to field, more careful to interpret bargains fairly and do good work; let them figure often as benefactors and be free with their money to the church, and the residue of worldly ambition is glorified, being sufficient, perhaps, to develop a merchant prince, a railway king, a "millionaire" of the kind the age adores. Thus it comes to pass that the domain which appeared safe enough from the followers of Him who sought no power in the earthly range is invaded by men who reckon all their business efforts privileged under the laws of heaven, and every advantage they win a Divine plan for wresting money from the hands of the devil.

Now it is upon Christianity as approving all this that the Moabites and Ammonites of our day are falling. They are frankly worshippers of Chemosh and Milcom,

not of Jehovah; they believe in wealth, their all is staked on the earthly prosperity and enjoyment for which they strive. It is too bad, they feel, to have their sphere and hopes curtailed by men who profess no respect for the world, no desire for its glory but a constant preference for things unseen; they writhe when they consider the triumphs wrested from them by rivals who count success an answer to prayer and believe themselves favourites of God. Or the frank heathen finds that in business a man professing Christianity in the customary way is as little cumbered as himself by any disdain of tarnished profits and "smart" devices. What else can be expected but that, driven back and back by the energy of Christians so called, the others shall begin to think Christianity itself largely a pretence? Do we wonder to see the revolution in France hurling its forces not only against wealth and rank, but also against the religion identified with wealth and rank? Do we wonder to see in our day socialism, which girds at great fortunes as an insult to humanity, joining hands with agnosticism and secularism to make assault on the church? It is precisely what might be looked for; nay, more, the opposition will go on till Christian profession is purged of hypocrisy and Christian practice is harmonized with the law of Christ. Not the push, not the equivocal success of one person here and there is it that creates doubt of Christianity and provokes antagonism, but the whole systems of society and business in so-called Christian lands, and even the conduct of affairs within the church, the strain of feeling there. For in the church as without it wealth and rank are important in themselves, and make some important who have little or no other claim to respect. In the church as without it methods are

adopted that involve large outlay and a constant need for the support of the wealthy; in the church as without it life depends too much on the abundance of the things that are possessed. And, in the not unfair judgment of those who stand outside, all this proceeds from a secret doubt of Christ's law and authority, which more than excuses their own denial. The strifes of the day, even those that turn on the Godhead of Christ and the inspiration of the Bible, as well as on the divine claim of the church, are not due solely to hatred of truth and the depravity of the human heart. They have more reason than the church has yet confessed. Christianity in its practical and speculative aspects is one; it cannot be a creed unless it is a life. It is essentially a life not conformed to this world, but transformed, redeemed. Our faith will stand secure from all attacks, vindicated as a supernatural revelation and inspiration, when the whole of church life and Christian endeavour shall rise above the earthly and be manifest everywhere as a fervent striving for the spiritual and eternal.

We have been assuming the unfaithfulness of Israel to its duty and vocation. The people of God, instead of commending His faith by their neighbourliness and generosity, were, we fear, too often proud and selfish, seeking their own things not the well-being of others, sending no attractive light into the heathenism around. Moab was akin to the Hebrews and in many respects similar in character. When we come to the Book of Ruth we find a certain intercourse between the two. Ammon, more unsettled and barbarous, was of the same stock. Israel, giving nothing to these peoples, but taking all she could from them, provoked antagonism all the more bitter that they were of kin to her, and they felt no scruple when their opportunity came. Not

only had the Israelites to suffer for their failure, but Moab and Ammon also. The wrong beginning of the relations between them was never undone. Moab and Ammon went on worshipping their own gods, enemies of Israel to the last.

Ehud appears a deliverer. He was a Benjamite, a man left-handed; he chose his own method of action, and it was to strike directly at the Moabite king. Eager words regarding the shamefulness of Israel's subjection had perhaps already marked him as a leader, and it may have been with the expectation that he would do a bold deed that he was chosen to bear the periodical tribute on this occasion to Eglon's palace. Girding a long dagger under his garment on his right thigh, where if found it might appear to be worn without evil intent, he set out with some attendants to the Moabite head-quarters. The narrative is so vivid that we seem able to follow Ehud step by step. He has gone from the neighbourhood of Jebus to Jericho, perhaps by the road in which the scene of our Lord's parable of the Good Samaritan was long afterwards laid. Having delivered the tribute into the hands of Eglon he goes southward a few miles to the sculptured stones at Gilgal, where possibly some outpost of the Moabites kept guard. There he leaves his attendants, and swiftly retracing his steps to the palace craves a private interview with the king and announces a message from God, at Whose name Eglon respectfully rises from his seat. One flash of the dagger and the bloody deed is done. Leaving the king's dead body there in the chamber, Ehud bolts the door and boldly passes the attendants, then quickening his pace is soon beyond Gilgal and away by another route through the steep hills to the mountains of Ephraim. Meanwhile the murder is discovered and

there is confusion at the palace. No one being at hand to give orders, the garrison is unprepared to act, and as Ehud loses no time in gathering a band and returning to finish his work, the fords of Jordan are taken before the Moabites can cross to the eastern side. They are caught, and the defeat is so decisive that Israel is free again for fourscore years.

Now this deed of Ehud's was clearly a case of assassination, and as such we have to consider it. The crime is one which stinks in our nostrils because it is associated with treachery and cowardice, the basest revenge or the most undisciplined passion. But if we go back to times of ruder morality and regard the circumstances of such a people as Israel, scattered and oppressed, waiting for a sign of bold energy that may give it new heart, we can easily see that one who chose to act as Ehud did would by no means incur the reprobation we now attach to the assassin. To go no farther back than the French Revolution and the deed of Charlotte Corday, we cannot reckon her among the basest—that woman of "the beautiful still countenance" who believed her task to be the duty of a patriot. Nevertheless, it is not possible to make a complete defence of Ehud. His act was treacherous. The man he slew was a legitimate king, and is not said to have done his ruling ill. Even allowing for the period, there was something peculiarly detestable in striking one to death who stood up reverently expecting a message from God. Yet Ehud may have thoroughly believed himself to be a Divine instrument.

This too we see, that the great just providence of the Almighty is not impeached by such an act. No word in the narrative justifies assassination; but, being done, place is found for it as a thing overruled for good in the

development of Israel's history. Man has no defence for his treachery and violence, yet in the process of events the barbarous deed, the fierce crime, are shown to be under the control of the Wisdom that guides all men and things. And here the issue which justifies Divine providence, though it does not purge the criminal, is clear. For through Ehud a genuine deliverance was wrought for Israel. The nation, curbed by aliens, overborne by an idolatrous power, was free once more to move toward the great spiritual end for which it had been created. We might be disposed to say that on the whole Israel made nothing of freedom, that the faith of God revived and the heart of the people became devout in times of oppression rather than of liberty. In a sense it was so, and the story of this people is the story of all, for men go to sleep over their best, they misuse freedom, they forget why they are free. Yet every eulogy of freedom is true. Man must even have the power of misusing it if he is to arrive at the best. It is in liberty that manhood is nursed, and therefore in liberty that religion matures. Autocratic laws mean tyranny, and tyranny denies the soul its responsibility to justice, truth, and God. Mind and conscience held from their high office, responsibility to the greatest overborne by some tyrant hand that may seem beneficent, the soul has no space, faith no room to breathe; man is kept from the spontaneity and gladness of his proper life. So we have to win liberty in hard struggle and know ourselves free in order that we may belong completely to God.

See how life advances! God deals with the human race according to a vast plan of discipline leading to heights which at first appear inaccessible. Freedom is one of the first of these, and only by way of it are the

higher summits reached. During the long ages of dark and weary struggle, which seem to many but a fruitless martyrdom, the Divine idea was interfused with all the strife. Not one blind stroke, not one agony of the craving soul was wasted. In all the wisdom of God wrought for man, through man's pathetic feebleness or most daring achievement. So out of the chaos of the gloomy valleys a highway of order was raised by which the race should mount to Freedom and thence to Faith.

We see it in the history of nations, those that have led the way and those that are following. The possessors of clear faith have won it in liberty. In Switzerland, in Scotland, in England, the order has been, first civil freedom, then Christian thought and vigour. Wallace and Bruce prepare the way for Knox; Boadicea, Hereward, the Barons of Magna Charta for Wycliffe and the Reformation; the men of the Swiss Cantons who won Morgarten and routed Charles the Bold were the forerunners of Zwingli and Farel. Israel, too, had its heroes of freedom; and even those who, like Ehud and Samson, did little or nothing for faith and struck wildly, wrongly for their country, did yet choose consciously to serve their people and were helpers of a righteousness and a holy purpose they did not know. When all has been said against them it remains true that the freedom they brought to Israel was a Divine gift.

It is to be remarked that Ehud did not judge Israel. He was a deliverer, but nowise fitted to exercise high office in the name of God. In some way not made clear in the narrative he had become the centre of the resolute spirits of Benjamin and was looked to by them to find an opportunity of striking at the oppressors. His calling, we may say, was human, not Divine; it was

limited, not national; and he was not a man who could rise to any high thought of leadership. The heads of tribes, ingloriously paying tribute to the Moabites, may have scoffed at him as of no account. Yet he did what they supposed impossible. The little rising grew with the rapidity of a thunder-cloud, and, when it passed, Moab, smitten as by a lightning flash, no longer overshadowed Israel. As for the deliverer, his work having been done apparently in the course of a few days, he is seen no more in the history. While he lived, however, his name was a terror to the enemies of Israel, for what he had effected once he might be depended upon to do again if necessity arose. And the land had rest.

Here is an example of what is possible to the obscure whose qualifications are not great, but who have spirit and firmness, who are not afraid of dangers and privations on the way to an end worth gaining, be it the deliverance of their country, the freedom or purity of their church, or the rousing of society against a flagrant wrong. Do the rich and powerful angrily refuse their patronage? Do they find much to say about the impossibility of doing anything, the evil of disturbing people's minds, the duty of submission to Providence and to the advice of wise and learned persons? Those who see the time and place for acting, who hear the clarion-call of duty, will not be deterred. Armed for their task with fit weapons—the two-edged dagger of truth for the corpulent lie, the penetrating stone of a just scorn for the forehead of arrogance, they have the right to go forth, the right to succeed, though probably when the stroke has told many will be heard lamenting its untimeliness and proving the dangerous indiscretion of Ehud and all who followed him.

In the same line another type is represented by Shamgar, son of Anath, the man of the ox-goad, who considered not whether he was equipped for attacking Philistines, but turned on them from the plough, his blood leaping in him with swift indignation. The instrument of his assault was not made for the use to which it was put: the power lay in the arm that wielded the goad and the fearless will of the man who struck for his own birthright, freedom,—for Israel's birthright, to be the servant of no other race. Undoubtedly it is well that, in any efforts made for the church or for society, men should consider how they are to act and should furnish themselves in the best manner for the work that is to be done. No outfit of knowledge, skill, experience is to be despised. A man does not serve the world better in ignorance than in learning, in bluntness than in refinement. But the serious danger for such an age as our own is that strength may be frittered away and zeal expended in the mere preparation of weapons, in the mere exercise before the war begins. The important points at issue are apt to be lost sight of, and the vital distinctions on which the whole battle turns to fade away in an atmosphere of compromise. There are those who, to begin, are Israelites indeed, with a keen sense of their nationality, of the urgency of certain great thoughts and the example of heroes. Their nationality becomes less and less to them as they touch the world; the great thoughts begin to seem parochial and antiquated; the heroes are found to have been mistaken, their names cease to thrill. The man now sees nothing to fight for, he cares only to go on perfecting his equipment. Let us do him justice. It is not the toil of the conflict he shrinks from, but the rudeness of it, the dust and heat

of warfare. He is no voluntary now, for he values the dignity of a State Church and feels the charm of ancient traditions. He is not a good churchman, for he will not be pledged to any creed or opposed to any school. He is rarely seen on any political platform, for he hates the watchwords of party. And this is the least of it. He is a man without a cause, a believer without a faith, a Christian without a stroke of brave work to do in the world. We love his mildness; we admire his mental possessions, his broad sympathies. But when we are throbbing with indignation he is too calm; when we catch at the ox-goad and fly at the enemy we know that he disdains our weapon and is affronted by our fire. Better, if it must be so, the rustic from the plough, the herdsman from the hill-side; better far he of the camel's hair garment and the keen cry, Repent, repent!

Israel, then, appears in these stories of her iron age as the cradle of the manhood of the modern world; in Israel the true standard was lifted up for the people. It is liberty put to a noble use that is the mark of manhood, and in Israel's history the idea of responsibility to the one living and true God takes form and clearness as that alone which fulfils and justifies liberty. Israel has a God Whose will man must do, and for the doing of it he is free. If at the outset the vigour which this thought of God infused into the Hebrew struggle for independence was tempestuous; if Jehovah was seen not in the majesty of eternal justice and sublime magnanimity, not as the Friend of all, but as the unseen King of a favoured people,—still, as freedom came, there came with it always, in some prophetic word, some Divine psalm, a more living conception of God as gracious, merciful, holy, unchangeable; and notwith-

standing all lapses the Hebrew was a man of higher quality than those about him. You stand by the cradle and see no promise, nothing to attract. But give the faith which is here in infancy time to assert itself, give time for the vision of God to enlarge, and the finest type of human life will arise and establish itself, a type possible in no other way. Egypt with its long and wonderful history gives nothing to the moral life of the new world, for it produces no men. Its kings are despots, tomb-builders, its people contented or discontented slaves. Babylon and Nineveh are names that dwarf Israel's into insignificance, but their power passes and leaves only some monuments for the antiquarian, some corroborations of a Hebrew record. Egypt and Chaldea, Assyria and Persia never reached through freedom the idea of man's proper life, never rose to the sense of that sublime calling or bowed in that profound adoration of the Holy One which made the Israelite, rude fanatic as he often was, a man and a father of men. From Egypt, from Babylon,—yea, from Greece and Rome came no redeemer of mankind, for they grew bewildered in the search after the chief end of existence and fell before they found it. In the prepared people it was, the people cramped in the narrow land between the Syrian desert and the sea, that the form of the future Man was seen, and there, where the human spirit felt at least, if it did not realise its dignity and place, the Messiah was born.

VII.

THE SIBYL OF MOUNT EPHRAIM.

JUDGES iv.

THERE arises now in Israel a prophetess, one of those rare women whose souls burn with enthusiasm and holy purpose when the hearts of men are abject and despondent; and to Deborah it is given to make a nation hear her call. Of prophetesses the world has seen but few; generally the woman has her work of teaching and administering justice in the name of God within a domestic circle and finds all her energy needed there. But queens have reigned with firm nerve and clear sagacity in many a land, and now and again a woman's voice has struck the deep note which has roused a nation to its duty. Such in the old Hebrew days was Deborah, wife of Lappidoth.

It was a time of miserable thraldom in Israel when she became aware of her destiny and began the sacred enterprise of her life. From Hazor in the north near the waters of Merom Israel was ruled by Jabin, king of the Canaanites—not the first of the name, for Joshua had before defeated one Jabin king of Hazor, and slain him. During the peace that followed Ehud's triumph over Moab the Hebrews, busy with worldly affairs, failed to estimate a danger which year by year became more definite and pressing—the rise of the

ancient strongholds of Canaan and their chiefs to new activity and power. Little by little the cities Joshua destroyed were rebuilt, re-fortified and made centres of warlike preparation. The old inhabitants of the land recovered spirit, while Israel lapsed into foolish confidence. At Harosheth of the Gentiles, under the shadow of Carmel, near the mouth of the Kishon, armourers were busy forging weapons and building chariots of iron. The Hebrews did not know what was going on, or missed the purpose that should have thrust itself on their notice. Then came the sudden rush of the chariots and the onset of the Canaanite troops, fierce, irresistible. Israel was subdued and bowed to a yoke all the more galling that it was a people they had conquered and perhaps despised that now rode over them. In the north at least the Hebrews were kept in servitude for twenty years, suffered to remain in the land but compelled to pay heavy tribute, many of them, it is likely, enslaved or allowed but a nominal independence. Deborah's song vividly describes the condition of things in her country. Shamgar had made a clearance on the Philistine border and kept his footing as a leader, but elsewhere the land was so swept by Canaanite spoilers that the highways were unused and Hebrew travellers kept to the tortuous and difficult by-paths down in the glens or among the mountains. There was war in all the gates, but in Israelite dwellings neither shield nor spear. Defenceless and crushed the people lay crying to gods that could not save, turning ever to new gods in strange despair, the national state far worse than when Cushan's army held the land or when Eglon ruled from the City of Palm Trees.

Born before this time of oppression Deborah spent

her childhood and youth in some village of Issachar, her home a rude hut covered with brushwood and clay, like those which are still seen by travellers. Her parents, we must believe, had more religious feeling than was common among Hebrews of the time. They would speak to her of the name and law of Jehovah, and she, we doubt not, loved to hear. But with the exception of brief oral traditions fitfully repeated and an example of reverence for sacred times and duties, a mere girl would have no advantages. Even if her father was chief of a village her lot would be hard and monotonous, as she aided in the work of the household and went morning and evening to fetch water from the spring or tended a few sheep on the hill-side. While she was yet young the Canaanite oppression began, and she with others felt the tyranny and the shame. The soldiers of Jabin came and lived at free quarters among the villagers, wasting their property. The crops were perhaps assessed, as they are at the present day in Syria, before they were reaped, and sometimes half or even more would be swept away by the remorseless collector of tribute. The people turned thriftless and sullen. They had nothing to gain by exerting themselves when the soldiers and the tax-gatherer were ready to exact so much the more, leaving them still in poverty. Now and again there might be a riot. Maddened by insults and extortion the men of the village would make a stand. But without weapons, without a leader, what could they effect? The Canaanite troops were upon them; some were killed, others carried away, and things became worse than before.

There was not much prospect at such a time for a Hebrew maiden whose lot it seemed to be, while yet scarcely out of her childhood, to be married like the

rest and sink into a household drudge, toiling for a husband who in his turn laboured for the oppressor. But there was a way then, as there is always a way for the high-spirited to save life from bareness and desolation; and Deborah found her path. Her soul went forth to her people, and their sad state moved her to something more than a woman's grief and rebellion. As years went by the traditions of the past revealed their meaning to her, deeper and larger thoughts came, a beginning of hope for the tribes so downcast and weary. Once they had swept victoriously through the land and smitten that very fortress which again overshadowed all the north. It was in the name of Jehovah and by His help that Israel then triumphed. Clearly the need was for a new covenant with Him; the people must repent and return to the Lord. Did Deborah put this before her parents, her husband? Doubtless they agreed with her, but could see no way of action, no opportunity for such as they. As she spoke more and more eagerly, as she ventured to urge the men of her village to bestir themselves, perhaps a few were moved, but the rest heard carelessly or derided her. We can imagine Deborah in that time of trial growing up into tall and striking womanhood, watching with indignation many a scene in which her people showed a craven fear or joined slavishly in heathen revels. As she spoke and saw her words burn the hearts of some to whom they were spoken, the sense of power and duty came. In vain she looked for a prophet, a leader, a man of Jehovah to rekindle a flame in the nation's heart. A flame! It was in her own soul, she might wake it in other souls; Jehovah helping her she would.

But when in her native tribe the brave woman

began to urge with prophetic eloquence the return to God and to preach a holy war her time of peril came. Issachar lay completely under the survey of Jabin's officers, overawed by his chariots. And one who would deliver a servile people had need to fear treachery. Issachar was "a strong ass couching down between the sheepfolds"; he had "bowed his shoulder to bear" and become "a servant under task-work." As her purpose matured she had to seek a place of safety and influence, and passing southward she found it in some retired spot among the hills between Bethel and Ramah, some nook of that valley which, beginning near Ai, curves eastward and narrows at Geba to a rocky gorge with precipices eight hundred feet high,—the Valley of Achor, of which Hosea long afterwards said that it should be a door of hope. Here, under a palm tree, the landmark of her tent, she began to prophesy and judge and grow to spiritual power among the tribes. It was a new thing in Israel for a woman to speak in the name of God. Her utterances had no doubt something of a sibyllic strain, and the deep or wild notes of her voice pleading for Jehovah or raised in passionate warning against idolatry touched the finest chords of the Hebrew soul. In her rapture she saw the Holy One coming in majesty from the southern desert where Horeb reared its sacred peak; or again, looking into the future, foretold His exaltation in proud triumph over the gods of Canaan, His people free once more, their land purged of every heathen taint. So gradually her place of abode became a rendezvous of the tribes, a seat of justice, a shrine of reviving hope. Those who longed for righteous administration came to her; those who were fearers of Jehovah gathered about her. Gaining wisdom she

was able to represent to a rude age the majesty as well as the purity of Divine law, to establish order as well as to communicate enthusiasm. The people felt that sagacity like hers and a spirit so sanguine and fearless must be the gift of Jehovah; it was the inspiration of the Almighty that gave her understanding.

Deborah's prophetical utterances are not to be tried by the standard of the Isaian age. So tested some of her judgments might fail, some of her visions lose their charm. She had no clear outlook to those great principles which the later prophets more or less fully proclaimed. Her education and circumstances and her intellectual power determined the degree in which she could receive Divine illumination. One woman before her is honoured with the name of prophetess, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, who led the refrain of the song of triumph at the Red Sea. Miriam's gift appears limited to the gratitude and ecstasy of one day of deliverance; and when afterwards on the strength of her share in the enthusiasm of the Exodus she ventured along with Aaron to claim equality with Moses, a terrible rebuke checked her presumption. Comparing Miriam and Deborah, we find as great an advance from the one to the other as from Deborah to Amos or Hosea. But this only shows that the inspiration of one mind, intense and ample for that mind, may come far short of the inspiration of another. God does not give every prophet the same insight as Moses, for the rare and splendid genius of Moses was capable of an illumination which very few in any following age have been able to receive. Even as among the Apostles of Christ St. Peter shows occasionally a lapse from the highest Christian judgment for which St. Paul has to take him to task, and yet does not cease to be inspired,

so Deborah is not to be denied the Divine gift though her song is coloured by an all too human exultation over a fallen enemy.

It is simply impossible to account for this new beginning in Israel's history without a heavenly impulse; and through Deborah unquestionably that impulse came. Others were turning to God, but she broke the dark spell which held the tribes and taught them afresh how to believe and pray. Under her palm tree there were solemn searchings of heart, and when the head men of the clans gathered there, travelling across the mountains of Ephraim or up the wadies from the fords of Jordan, it was first to humble themselves for the sin of idolatry, and then to undertake with sacred oaths and vows the serious work which fell to them in Israel's time of need. Not all came to that solemn rendezvous. When is such a gathering completely representative? Of Judah and Simeon we hear nothing. Perhaps they had their own troubles with the wandering tribes of the desert; perhaps they did not suffer as the others from Canaanite tyranny and therefore kept aloof. Reuben on the other side Jordan wavered, Manasseh made no sign of sympathy; Asher, held in check by the fortress of Hazor and the garrison of Harosheth, chose the safe part of inaction. Dan was busy trying to establish a maritime trade. But Ephraim and Benjamin, Zebulun and Naphtali were forward in the revival, and proudly the record is made on behalf of her native tribe, "the princes of Issachar were with Deborah." Months passed; the movement grew steadily, there was a stirring among the dry bones, a resurrection of hope and purpose.

And with all the care used this could not be hid from the Canaanites. For doubtless in not a few Israelite

homes heathen wives and half-heathen children would be apt to spy and betray. It goes hardly with men if they have bound themselves by any tie to those who will not only fail in sympathy when religion makes demands, but will do their utmost to thwart serious ambitions and resolves. A man is terribly compromised who has pledged himself to a woman of earthly mind, ruled by idolatries of time and sense. He has undertaken duties to her which a quickened sense of Divine law will make him feel the more; she has her claim upon his life, and there is nothing to wonder at if she insists upon her view, to his spiritual disadvantage and peril. In the time of national quickening and renewed thoughtfulness many a Hebrew discovered the folly of which he had been guilty in joining hands with women who were on the side of the Baalim and resented any sacrifice made for Jehovah. Here we find the explanation of much lukewarmness, indifference to the great enterprises of the church and withholding of service by those who make some profession of being on the Lord's side. The entanglements of domestic relationship have far more to do with failure in religious duty than is commonly supposed.

Amid difficulty and discouragement enough, with slender resources, the hope of Israel resting upon her, Deborah's heart did not fail nor her head for affairs. When the critical point was reached of requiring a general for the war she had already fixed upon the man. At Kadesh-Naphtali, almost in sight of Jabin's fortress, on a hill overlooking the waters of Merom, ninety miles to the north, dwelt Barak the son of Abinoam. The neighbourhood of the Canaanite capital and daily evidence of its growing power made Barak ready for any enterprise which had in it good promise

of success, and he had better qualifications than mere resentment against injustice and eager hatred of the Canaanite oppression. Already known in Zebulun and Naphtali as a man of bold temper and sagacity, he was in a position to gather an army corps out of those tribes—the main strength of the force on which Deborah relied for the approaching struggle. Better still, he was a fearer of God. To Kadesh-Naphtali the prophetess sent for the chosen leader of the troops of Israel, addressing to him the call of Jehovah: "Hath not the Lord commanded thee saying, Go and draw towards Mount Tabor"—that is, Bring by detachments quietly from the different cities towards Mount Tabor—"ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun?" The rendezvous of Sisera's host was Harosheth of the Gentiles, in the defile at the western extremity of the valley of Megiddo, where Kishon breaks through to the plain of Acre. Tabor overlooked from the north-east the same wide strath which was to be the field where the chariots and the multitude should be delivered into Barak's hand.

Not doubting the word of God, Barak sees a difficulty. For himself he has no prophetic gift; he is ready to fight, but this is to be a sacred war. From the very first he would have the men gather with the clear understanding that it is for religion as much as for freedom they are taking arms; and how may this be secured? Only if Deborah will go with him through the country proclaiming the Divine summons and promise of victory. He is very decided on the point. "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, I will not go." Deborah agrees, though she would fain have left this matter entirely to men. She warns him that the expedition will not be to his honour, since

Jehovah will give Sisera into the hand of a woman. Against her will she takes part in the military preparations. There is no need to find in Deborah's words a prophecy of the deed of Jael. It is a grossly untrue taunt that the murder of Sisera is the central point of the whole narrative. When Deborah says, "The Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman," the reference plainly is, as Josephus makes it, to the position into which Deborah herself was forced as the chief person in the campaign. With great wisdom and the truest courage she would have limited her own sphere. With equal wisdom and equal courage Barak understood how the zeal of the people was to be maintained. There was a friendly contest, and in the end the right way was found, for unquestionably Deborah was the genius of the movement. Together they went to Kedesh,—not Kadesh-Naphtali in the far north, but Kedesh on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, some twelve miles from Tabor.[1] From that as a centre, journeying by secluded ways through the northern districts, often perhaps by night, Deborah and Barak went together rousing the enthusiasm of the people, until the shores of the lake and the valleys running down to it were quietly occupied by thousands of armed men.

The clans are at length gathered; the whole force marches from Kedesh to the foot of Tabor to give battle. And now Sisera, fully equipped, moves out of Harosheth along the course of the Kishon, marching well beneath the ridge of Carmel, his chariots thundering in the van. Near Taanach he orders his front to be formed to the north, crosses the Kishon and advances on the Hebrews who by this time are visible beyond

[1] See Conder's *Tent Work in Palestine*.

the slope of Moreh. The tremendous moment has come. "Up," cries Deborah, "for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand. Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" She has waited till the troops of Sisera are entangled among the streams which here, from various directions, converge to the river Kishon, now swollen with rain and difficult to cross. Barak, the Lightning Chief, leads his men impetuously down into the plain, keeping near the shoulder of Moreh where the ground is not broken by the streams; and with the fall of evening he begins the attack. The chariots have crossed the Kishon but are still struggling in the swamps and marshes. They are assailed with vehemence and forced back, and in the waning light all is confusion. The Kishon sweeps away many of the Canaanite host, the rest make a stand by Taanach and further on by the waters of Megiddo. The Hebrews find a higher ford and following the south bank of the river are upon the foe again. It is a November night and meteors are flashing through the sky. They are an omen of evil to the disheartened half-defeated army. Do not the stars in their courses fight against Sisera? The rout becomes complete; Barak pursues the scattered force towards Harosheth, and at the ford near the city there is terrible loss. Only the fragments of a ruined army find shelter within the gates.

Meanwhile Sisera, a coward at heart, more familiar with the parade ground than fit for the stern necessities of war, leaves his chariot and abandons his men to their fate, his own safety all his care. Seeking that, it is not to Harosheth he turns. He takes his way across Gilboa toward the very region which Barak has left. On a little plateau overlooking the Sea of Galilee, near

Kedesh, there is a settlement of Kenites whom Sisera thinks he can trust. Like a hunted animal he presses on over ridge and through defile till he reaches the black tents and receives from Jael the treacherous welcome, "Turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not." The pitiful tragedy follows. The coward meets at the hand of a woman the death from which he has fled. Jael gives him fermented milk to drink which, exhausted as he is, sends him into a deep sleep. Then, as he lies helpless, she smites the tent-pin through his temples.

In her song Deborah describes and glories over the execution of her country's enemy. "Blessed among women shall Jael, the wife of Heber be; with the hammer she smote Sisera; at her feet he curled up, he fell." Exulting in every circumstance of the tragedy, she adds a description of Sisera's mother and her ladies expecting his return as a victor laden with spoil, and listening eagerly for the wheels of that chariot which never again should roll through the streets of Harosheth. As to the whole of this passage, our estimate of Deborah's knowledge and spiritual insight does not require us to regard her praise and her judgment as absolute. She rejoices in a deed which has crowned the great victory over the master of nine hundred chariots, the terror of Israel; she glories in the courage of another woman, who single-handed finished that tyrant's career; she does not make God responsible for the deed. Let the outburst of her enthusiastic relief stand as the expression of intense feeling, the rebound from fear and anxiety of the patriotic heart. We need not weight ourselves with the suspicion that the prophetess reckoned Jael's deed the outcome of a Divine thought. No: but we may believe this of Jael, that she is on the side of Israel, her

sympathy so far repressed by the league of her people with Jabin, yet prompting her to use every opportunity of serving the Hebrew cause. It is clear that if the Kenite treaty had meant very much and Jael had felt herself bound by it, her tent would have been an asylum for the fugitive. But she is against the enemies of Israel; her heart is with the people of Jehovah in the battle and she is watching eagerly for signs of the victory she desires them to win. Unexpected, startling, the sign appears in the fleeing captain of Jabin's host, alone, looking wildly for shelter. "Turn in, my lord; turn in." Will he enter? Will he hide himself in a woman's tent? Then to her will be committed vengeance. It will be an omen that the hour of Sisera's fate has come. Hospitality itself must yield; she will break even that sacred law to do stern justice on a coward, a tyrant, and an enemy of God.

A line of thought like this is entirely in harmony with the Arab character. The moral ideas of the desert are rigorous, and contempt rapidly becomes cruel. A tent woman has few elements of judgment, and, the balance turning, her conclusion will be quick, remorseless. Jael is no blameless heroine; neither is she a demon. Deborah, who understands her, reads clearly the rapid thoughts, the swift decision, the unscrupulous act and sees, behind all, the purpose of serving Israel. Her praise of Jael is therefore with knowledge; but she herself would not have done the thing she praises. All possible explanations made, it remains a murder, a wild savage thing for a woman to do, and we may ask whether among the tents of Zaanannim Jael was not looked on from that day as a woman stained and shadowed,—one who had been treacherous to a guest.

Not here can the moral be found that the end justifies the means, or that we may do evil with good intent; which never was a Bible doctrine and never can be. On the contrary, we find it written clear that the end does not justify the means. Sisera must live on and do the worst he may rather than any soul should be soiled with treachery or any hand defiled by murder. There are human vermin, human scorpions and vipers. Is Christian society to regard them, to care for them? The answer is that Providence regards them and cares for them. They are human after all, men whom God has made, for whom there are yet hopes, who are no worse than others would be if Divine grace did not guard and deliver. Rightly does Christian society affirm that a human being in peril, in suffering, in any extremity common to men is to be succoured as a man, without inquiry whether he is good or vile. What then of justice and man's administration of justice? This, that they demand a sacred calm, elevation above the levels of personal feeling, mortal passion and ignorance. Law is to be of no private, sudden, unconsidered administration. Only in the most solemn and orderly way is the trial of the worst malefactor to be gone about, sentence passed, justice executed. To have reached this understanding of law with regard to all accused and suspected persons and all evildoers is one of the great gains of the Christian period. We need not look for anything like the ideal of justice in the age of the judges; deeds were done then and zealously and honestly praised which we must condemn. They were meant to bring about good, but the sum of human violence was increased by them and more work made for the moral reformer of after times. And going back to Jael's deed we see that it gave Israel little more than

vengeance. In point of fact the crushing defeat of the army left Sisera powerless, discredited, open to the displeasure of his master. He could have done Israel no more harm.

One point remains. Emphatically are we reminded that life continually brings us to sudden moments in which we must act without time for careful reflection, the spirit of our past flashing out in some quick deed or word of fate. Sisera's past drove him in panic over the hills to Zaanannim. Jael's past came with her to the door of the tent; and the two as they looked at each other in that tragic moment were at once, without warning, in a crisis for which every thought and passion of years had made a way. Here the self-pampering of a vain man had its issue. Here the woman, undisciplined, impetuous, catching sight of the means to do a deed, moves to the fatal stroke like one possessed. It is the sort of thing we often call madness, and yet such insanity is but the expression of what men and women choose to be capable of. The casual allowance of an impulse here, a craving there, seems to mean little until the occasion comes when their accumulated force is sharply or terribly revealed. The laxity of the past thus declares itself; and on the other hand there is often a gathering of good to a moment of revelation. The soul that has for long years fortified itself in pious courage, in patient well-doing, in high and noble thought, leaps one day, to its own surprise, to the height of generous daring or heroic truth. We determine the issue of crises which we cannot foresee.

VIII.

DEBORAH'S SONG: A DIVINE VISION.

JUDGES v.

THE song of Deborah and Barak is twofold, the first portion, ending with the eleventh verse, a chant of rising hope and pious encouragement during the time of preparation and revival, the other a song of battle and victory throbbing with eager patriotism and the hot breath of martial excitement. In the former part God is celebrated as the Helper of Israel from of old and from afar; He is the spring of the movement in which the singer rejoices, and in His praise the strophes culminate. But human nature asserts itself after the great and decisive triumph in the vivid touches of the latter canto. In it more is told of the doings of men, and there is picturesque fiery exultation over the fallen. One might almost think that Deborah, herself childless, glories over the mother of Sisera in the utter desolation which falls on her when she hears the tidings of her son's defeat and death. Yet this mood ceases abruptly, and the song returns to Jehovah, Whose friends are lifted up to joy and strength by His availing help.

The main interest of the twofold song lies in its religious colour, for here the pious ardour of the Israel of the judges comes to finest expression. As a whole

it is more patriotic than moral, more warlike than religious, and thus unquestionably reflects the temper of the time. What ideas do we find in it of the relation of Israel to God and of God to Israel, what conceptions of the Divine character? Jehovah is invoked and praised as the God of the Hebrews alone. He seems to have no interest in the Canaanites, nor compassion towards them. Yet the grandeur of the Divine forthgoing is declared in bold and striking imagery, and the high resolves of men are clearly traced to the Spirit of the Almighty. Duty to God is linked with duty to country, and it is at least suggested that Israel without Jehovah is nothing and has no right to a place among the peoples. The nation exists for the glory of its Heavenly King, to make known His power and His righteous acts. A strain like this in a war-song belonging to the time of Israel's semi-barbarism bears no uncertain promise. From the well-spring out of which it flows clear and sparkling there will come other songs, with tenderer music and holier longing,—songs of spiritual hope and generous desire for Messianic peace.

1. The first religious note is struck in what may be called the opening Hallelujah, although the ejaculation, "Bless the Lord," is not, in Hebrew, that which afterwards became the great refrain of sacred song.

> "For that leaders led in Israel,
> For that the people offered themselves willingly:
> Bless ye Jehovah."

Here is more than belief in Providence. It is faith in the spiritual presence and power of God swaying the souls of men. Has Deborah seen at last, after long

efforts to rouse the careless people, one and another responding to her appeals and seeking her tent among the hills? Has she witnessed the vows of the chiefs of Issachar and Zebulun that they would not be wanting in the day of battle? Not to herself but to the God of Israel is the new temper ascribed. Jehovah, Who touched her own heart, has now touched many another. For years she had been aware of holier influences than came to her from the people among whom she lived. In secret, in the silence of the heart, she had found herself mastered by thoughts that none around her shared. She has well accounted for them. Jehovah has spoken to her, Jehovah caring still for His people, waiting to redeem them from bondage. And now, when her prophetic cry finds echo in other souls, when men who were asleep rise up and declare their purpose, especially when from this side and that companies of brave youths and resolute elders come to her—from the slopes of Carmel, from the hills of Gilead —the fire of hope in their eyes, how otherwise explain the upspringing of energy and devotion than as the work of the Spirit that has moved her own soul? To Jehovah is all the praise.

Common enough in our day is a profession of belief in God as the source of every good desire and right effort, as inspiring the charity of the generous, the affection of the loving, the fidelity of the true. But it our faith is deep and real it brings us much nearer than we usually feel ourselves to be to Him Who is the Life indeed. The existence and energy of God are assured to those who have this insight. Every kindness done by man to man is a testimony against which denial of the Divine life has no power. Though the intellect searching far afield makes out only as

it were some few dim and indistinct footprints of a Mighty Being Who has passed by, seen at intervals on the plains of history, then lost in the morasses or on the rocky ground, there ought to be found in every human life daily evidence of Divine grace and wisdom. The good, the true, the noble constantly appeal to men, find men; and through these God finds them. When a magnanimous word is spoken, God is heard. When a deed is done in love, in purity, in courage or pity, God is seen. When out of languor and corruption and self-indulgence men arise and set their faces to the steep of duty, God is revealed. He in Whom we trust for the redemption of the world never leaves Himself without a witness, whether faith perceives or unbelief denies. The human story unfolds a Divine urgency by which the progress, the evolution of all that is good proceed from age to age. Man has never been left to nature alone nor to himself alone. The supernatural has always mingled with his life. He has resisted often, he has rebelled; yet conscience has not ceased, God has not withdrawn. This living energy of Jehovah, not only as belonging to the past but discovered in the new zeal of Israel, Deborah saw, and in virtue of the revelation she was far before her time. For the fresh life of the people, for the willing self-devotion of so many to the great cause, she lifted her voice in praise to Israel's Eternal Friend.

2. The next passage may be called a prologue in the heavens. Partly historical, it is chiefly a vision of Jehovah's age-long work for His people. In words that flash and roll the song describes the glorious advent of the Most High, nature astir with His presence, the mountains shaking under His tread.

The seat of the Divine Majesty appears to the

prophetess to be in Seir. She looks across the hills of the south and passes beyond the desert to that place of mystery where God spoke in thunder and proclaimed Himself in the Law. The imagery points to the phenomena of earthquake and a fearful lightning storm accompanied with heavy rain. These, the most striking natural symbols of the supernatural, form the materials of the strophe. Perhaps even as the song is chanted the thunders of Sinai are echoed in a great storm that shakes the sky and rolls among the hills. The outward signs represent the new impressions of Divine power and authority which are startling and rousing the tribes. They have heard no voices, seen no tokens of God for many a year. He Who led their fathers out of bondage, He Who marched with them through the desert, has been forgotten; but He returns, He is with them again. The office of the prophetess is to celebrate God's presence and excite in the dull souls of men some feeling of His majesty. Sinai once trembled and was dismayed before God. The great peak beside which Tabor is but a mound flowed down in volcanic glow and rush. It is He Whose coming Deborah hears in the beating storm, He Whose victorious feet shake the hills of Ephraim. Have the people forsaken their King? Let them seek Him, trust Him now. Under the shadow of His wings there is refuge; before His arrows and the fierce floods He pours from heaven who can stand?

It has been well said that for the Israel of ancient times all natural phenomena—a storm, a hurricane or a flood—had more than ordinary import. "Forbidden to recognise and, as it were, grasp the God of heaven in any material form, or to adore even in the heavens themselves any constant symbols of His being and His

power, yet yearning more in spirit for manifestations of His invisible existence, Israel's mind was ever on the stretch for any hint in nature of the unseen Celestial Being, for any glimpse of His mysterious ways, and its courage rose to a far higher pitch when Divine encouragement and impulse seemed to come from the material world."[1] From the images of Baal and the Ashtaroth Israel had turned; but where was their Heavenly King? The answer came with marvellous power when Deborah in the midst of the rolling thunder could say, "Lord, when Thou wentest forth out of Seir, when Thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, the heavens also dropped. The mountains flowed down at the presence of Jehovah." If the people bethought themselves of the clear demonstration of Divine majesty made to their fathers, they would realize God once more as the Ruler in heaven and earth. Then would courage revive, and in the faith of the Almighty they would go forth to victory.

Now was there in this faith an element of reason, a correspondence with fact? Is it fancy and nothing else, the poetic flight of an ardent soul eager to rouse a nation? Have we here an arbitrary connection made between striking natural events and a Divine Person throned in the heavens Whose existence the prophetess assumes, Whose supposed claim to obedience haunts her mind? In such a question our age utters its scepticism.

An age it is of science, of positive science. Toiling for centuries at the task of understanding the phenomenal, research has at length assumed the right to tell us what we must believe concerning the world—

---

[1] Ewald.

what we are to *believe*, observe, for it is a new creed and nothing else that confronts us here. "The government of the world," says one, "must not be considered as determined by an extramundane intelligence, but by one immanent in the cosmical forces and their relations." Another says: "The world or matter with its properties which we term forces must have existed from eternity and must last for ever—in one word, the world cannot have been created. . . . The ever-changing action of the natural forces is the fundamental cause of all that arises and perishes." Or again, not most recent in time but entirely modern in temper, we have the following: "Science has gradually taken all the positions of the childish belief of the peoples; it has snatched thunder and lightning from the hands of the gods. The stupendous powers of the Titans of the olden time have been grasped by the fingers of man. That which appeared inexplicable, miraculous and the work of a supernatural power has by the touch of science proved to be the effect of hitherto unknown natural forces. Everything that happens does so in a natural way, *i.e.*, in a mode determined only by accidental or necessary coalition of existing materials and their immanent natural forces." Here is dogma forced on faith with fine energy; and what more is to be said when judgment is given—"I have searched the heavens, but have nowhere found the traces of a God"?

We hear the boast that no song of Hebrew seer can withstand this modern wisdom, that the superstition of Bible faith shall vanish like starlight before the rising sun. To science every opinion shall submit. But wait. It is dogmatism against belief after all, authority against authority, and the one in a lower region than the other, with vastly inferior sanctions.

Natural science declares the present result of its observation of the universe, investigation brief, superficial, and limited to one small corner of the whole. Yet these deliverances are to be set above the science which deals with existence on the highest plane, the spiritual, solving deepest problems of life and conscience, finding perpetual support in the experience of men. The claim is somewhat large; it lacks the proof of service; it lacks verification. Science boasts greatly, as is natural to its adolescence. But at what point can it dare to say, Here is final truth, here is certainty? We do not repel our debt to the discoverer when we maintain that natural science is only watching the surface of a stream for a few miles along its course, while the springs far away among the eternal hills and the outflow into the infinite ocean are never viewed. Are we taunted with believing? Those who taunt us must supply for their part something more than inference ere we trust all to their wisdom. The "Force" that is so much invoked, what is it so far as the definitions of science go? Effects we see; Force never. All statements as to the nature of force are pure dogma. It is declared that there are necessary and eternal laws of matter. What makes them necessary, and who can prove their everlastingness? Using such words men pass infinitely beyond material research—they infer—they assert. In the region of natural science we can affirm nothing to be eternal, and even *necessity* is a word that has no warrant. It is only in the soul, in the region of moral ideas, we come on that which endures, which is necessary, which has constant reality. And it is here that our belief in God as universal Creator, the Source of power and life, the One Agent, the King eternal, immortal and invisible, finds root and strength.

The battle between materialism and religious faith is not a battle in which facts are arrayed on one side and inferences and dreams on the other. The array is of facts against facts, as we have said, and with an immense difference of value. Is it an established sequence that when the electricity in the clouds is not in equipoise with that of the earth, under certain conditions there is a thunderstorm? It is surely a sequence of higher moment that when the sense of righteousness seizes the minds of men they rise against iniquity and there is a revolution. There natural forces operate, here spiritual. But on which side is the indication of eternity? Which of these sequences can better claim to give a key to the order of the universe? Surely if the evolution of the ages, so far, has culminated in man with his capability of knowing and serving the true, the just, the good, these facts of his mind and life are the highest of which we can take cognizance, and in them, if anywhere, we must find the key to all knowledge, the reason of all phenomena. Evolutionary science itself must agree to this. In the movements of nature we find no advance to fixity and finality. Nature labours, men labour with or against nature; but the flux of things is perpetual; there is no escape from change. In the efforts of the spiritual life it is not so. When we strive for equalness, for verity, for purity, we have glimpses then of the changeless order which we must needs call Divine. Here is the indication of eternity; and as we investigate, as we experience, we come to certitude, we reach larger vision, larger faith. That which endures rises clear above that which appears and passes.

Returning to Deborah's song and her vision of the coming of God in the impetuous storm, we see the

practical value of Theism. One great idea, comprehensive and majestic, leads thought beyond symbol and change to the All-righteous Lord. To attribute phemena to "Nature" is a sterile mode of thought; nothing is done for life. To attribute phenomena to a variety of superhuman persons limits and weakens the religious idea sought after; still one is lost in the changeable. Theism delivers the soul from both evils and sets it on a free upward path, stern yet alluring. By this path the Hebrew prophet rose to the high and fruitful conceptions which draw men together in responsibility and worship. The eternal governs all, rules every change; and that eternal is the holy will of God. The omnipotence nature obeys is the omnipotence of right. Israel returning to God will find Him coming to the help of His people in the awful or kindly movements of the natural world. Our view in one sense extends beyond that of the Hebrew seer. We find the purpose disclosed in natural phenomena to be somewhat different. Not the protection of a favoured race, but the discipline of humanity is what we perceive. Ours is an expansion of the Hebrew faith, revealing the same Divine goodness engaged in a redeeming work of wider scope and longer duration.

The point is still in doubt among us whether the good, the true, the right, are invincible. Those who go forth in the service of God are often borne down by the graceless multitude. From age to age the problem of God's supremacy seems to remain in suspense, and men are not afraid, in the name of foulest iniquity, to try issues with the best. Be it so. The Divine work is slow. Even the best need discipline that they may have strength, and God is in no haste to carry His argument against atheism. There is abundance of time. Those

bent on evil or misled by falsehood, those who are on the wrong side though they consider themselves soldiers of a good cause may gain on many a field, yet their gain will turn out in the long run to be loss, and they who lose and fall are really the victors. There is defeat that is better than success. Other ages than belong to this world's history are yet to dawn, and the discovery will come to every intelligence that he alone triumphs whose life is spent for righteousness and love, in fidelity to God and man.

3. Let it be allowed that we find the latter canto of Deborah's song expressive of faith rather than of clear morality, pointing to a spiritual future rather than exhibiting actual knowledge of the Divine character. We hear of the righteous acts of the Lord, and the note is welcome, yet most likely the thought is of retributive justice and punishment that overtakes the enemies of Israel. When the remnant of the nobles and the people come down—that remnant of brave and faithful men never wanting to Israel—the Lord comes down with them, their Guide and Strength. Meroz is cursed because the inhabitants do not go forth to the help of Jehovah. And finally there is glorying over Sisera because he is an enemy of Israel's Unseen King. There is trust, there is devotion, but no largeness of spiritual view.

We must, however, remember that a song full of the spirit of battle and the gladness of victory cannot be expected to breathe the ideal of religion. The mind of the singer is too excited by the circumstances of the time, the bustle, the triumph, to dwell on higher themes. When fighting has to be done it is the main business of the hour, cannot be aught else to those who are engaged. A woman especially, strung to an unusual

pitch of nervous endurance, would be absorbed in the events and her own new and strange position; and she would pass rapidly from the tension of anxiety to a keen passionate exultation in which everything was lost except the sense of deliverance and of personal vindication. When that is past which was an issue of life or death, freedom or destruction, joy rises in a sudden spring, joy in the prowess of men, the fulness of Divine succour; neither the prophetess nor the fighters are indifferent to justice and mercy, though they do not name them here. Deborah, a woman of intense patriotism and piety, dared greatly for God and her country; of a base thing she was incapable. The men who fought by the waters of Megiddo and slew their enemies ruthlessly in the heat of battle knew in the time of peace the duties of humanity and no doubt showed kindness when the war was over to the widows and orphans of the slain. To know and serve Jehovah was a guarantee of moral culture in a rude age; and the Israelites when they returned to Him must have contrasted very favourably in respect of conduct with the devotees of Baal and Astarte.

For a parallel case we may turn to Oliver Cromwell. In his letter after the storming of Bristol, a bloody piece of work in which the mettle of the Parliamentary force was put keenly to proof, Cromwell ascribes the victory to God in these terms:—"They that have been employed in this service know that faith and prayer obtained this city for you. God hath put the sword in the Parliament's hands for the terror of evil-doers and the praise of them that do well." Of victory after victory which left many a home desolate he speaks as mercies to be acknowledged with all thankfulness. "God exceedingly abounds in His goodness to us, and

will not be weary until righteousness and peace meet, and until He hath brought forth a glorious work for the happiness of this poor kingdom." Read his dispatches and you find that though the man had a generous heart and was a sworn servant of Christ the merciful, yet he breathes no compassion for the royal troops. These are the enemy against whom a pious man is bound to fight; the slaughter of them is a terrible necessity.

Just now it is the fashion to depreciate as much as possible the moral value of the old Hebrew faith. We are assured in a tone of authority that Israel's Jehovah was only another Chemosh, or, say, a respectable Baal, a being without moral worth,—in fact, a mere name of might worshipped by Israelites as their protector. The history of the people settles this uncritical theory. If the religion of Israel did not sustain a higher morality, if the faith of Jehovah was purely secular, how came Israel to emerge as a nation from the long conflict with Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites and Philistines? The Hebrews were not superior in point of numbers, unity or military skill to the nations whose interest it was to subdue or expel them. Some vantage ground the Israelites must have had. What was it? Justice between man and man, domestic honour, care for human life, a measure of unselfishness,—these at least, as well as the entire purity of their religious rites, were their inheritance; through these the blessing of the Eternal rested upon them. There could never be a return to Him in penitence and hope without a return to the duties and the faith of the sacred covenant. We know therefore that while Deborah sings her song of battle and exults over fallen Sisera there is latent in her mind and the minds of her people a warmth of moral purpose justifying their new liberty. This nation

is again a militant church. The hearts of men enlarge that God may dwell in them. Israel's triumph, shall it not be for the good of those who are overcome? Shall not the people of Jehovah, going forth as the sun in his might, shed a kindly radiance over the lands around? So fine a conception of duty is scarcely to be found in Deborah's song, but, realized or not in Old Testament times, it was the revelation of God through Israel to the world.

IX.

DEBORAH'S SONG: A CHANT OF PATRIOTISM.

JUDGES v.

WE have already considered the song of Deborah as a declaration of God's working more broad and spiritual than might be looked for in that age. We now regard it as exhibiting different relations of men to the Divine purpose. There is a religious spirit in the whole movement here described. It begins in a revival of faith and obedience, prospers despite the coldness and opposition of many, grows in force and enthusiasm as it proceeds and finally is crowned with success. The church is militant in a literal sense; yet, fighting with carnal weapons, it is really contending for the glory of the Unseen King. There is a close parallel between the enterprise of Deborah and Barak and that which opens before the church of the present time. No forced accommodation is needed to gather from the song lessons of different kinds for our guidance and warning in the campaign of Christianity.

Here are Deborah herself, a mother in Israel, and the leaders who take their places at the head of the armies of God. Here also are the people willingly offering themselves, imperilling their lives for religion and freedom. The history of the past and the vision of Jehovah as sole Ruler of nature and providence en-

courage the faithful, who rise out of lethargy and leave the by-ways of life to take the field in battle array. The levies of Ephraim, Benjamin, Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali represent those who are decisively Christian, ready to hazard all for the gospel's sake. But Reuben sits among the sheepfolds and listens to the pipings for the flocks, Dan remains in ships, Asher at the haven of the sea; and these may stand for the self-cultivating self-serving professors of religion. Jabin and Sisera again are established opponents of the right cause; they are brave in their own defence; their positions look most formidable, their battalions shake the ground. But the stars from heaven, the floods of Kishon, are only a small part of the forces of the King of heaven; and the soul of Israel marches on in strength till the enemy is routed. Meroz practically helps the foe. Those who dwell within its walls are doubtful of the issue and will not risk their lives; the curse of sullen apostasy falls upon them. Jael is a vivid type of the unscrupulous helpers of a good cause, those who employing the weapons and methods of the world would fain be servants of that kingdom in which nothing base, nothing earthly can have place. And there are the children of the hour, the fine ladies of Harosheth whose pleasure and pride are bound up with oppression, who look through the lattices and listen in vain for the returning chariots laden with spoil

1. The leaders and head men of the tribes under Deborah and Barak, Deborah foremost in the great enterprise, her soul on fire with zeal for Israel and for God.

Deborah and Barak show throughout that spirit of cordial agreement, that frank support of each other

which at all times are so much to be desired in religious leaders. There is no jealousy, no striving for pre-eminence. Barak is a brave man, but he will not stir without the prophetess; he is quite content to give her the place of honour while he does the martial work. Deborah again would commit the task to Barak's hands in complete reliance on his wisdom and valour; yet she is ready to appear along with him, and in her song, while she claims the prophetic office, it is to Barak she renders the honours of victory—"Lead thy thraldom in thrall, thou son of Abinoam."

Rarely, it must be confessed, is there entire harmony among the leaders of affairs. Jealousy is too often with them from the first. Suspicion lurks under the council table, private ambitions and unworthy fears make confusion when each should trust and encourage another. The fine enthusiasm of a great cause does not overcome as it ought the selfishness of human nature. Moreover, varieties in disposition as between the cautious and the impetuous, the more and the less of sagacity or of faith, a failure in sincerity here, in justice there, are separating influences constantly at work. But when the pressing importance of the duties entrusted to men by God governs every will, these elements of division cease; leaders who differ in temperament are loyal to each other then, each jealous of the others' honour as servants of truth. In the Reformation, for example, prosperity was largely due to the fact that two such men as Luther and Melanchthon, very different yet thoroughly united, stood side by side in the thick of the conflict, Luther's impetuosity moderated by the calmer spirit of the other, Melanchthon's craving for peace kept from dangerous concession by the boldness of his friend. Their mutual love and fidelity

showed the nobleness of both, showed also what the Protestant Gospel was. Their differences melted away in enthusiasm for the Word of God, which one thought of as a celestial ambrosia, the other as a sword, a war, a destruction springing upon the children of Ephraim like a lioness in the forest. The Divine work was the life of each; each in his own way sought with splendid earnestness to forward the truth of Christ.

Church leaders are responsible for not a little which they themselves condemn. Differences do not quickly arise among disciples when the teachers are modest, honourable, and brotherly. Paul cries, "Is Christ divided? Were ye baptized into the name of Paul? What is Apollos? What is Paul? Ministers by whom ye believed." When our leaders speak and feel in like manner there will be peace, not uniformity but something better. God's husbandry, God's building will prosper.

But it is declared to be jealousy for religion that divides—jealousy for the pure doctrine of Christ—jealousy for the true church. We try to believe it. But then why are not all in that spirit of holy jealousy found side by side as comrades, eagerly yet in cordial brotherhood discussing points of difference, determined that they will search together and help each other until they find principles in which they can all rest? The leaders of different Christian bodies do not appear like Deborah and Barak engaged in a common enterprise, but as chiefs of rival or even opposing armies. The reason is that in this church and the other there has been a foreclosing of questions, and the elected leaders are almost all men who are pledged to the tribal decrees. In the decisions of councils and synods, and not less in the deliverances of learned doctors apologising each

for his own sect and marking out the path his party must travel, there has been ever since the days of the apostles a hardening and limiting of opinion. Thought has been prematurely crystallized and each church prides itself on its own special deposit. The true church leader should understand that a course which may have been inevitable in the past is not the virtue of to-day and that those are simply adhering to an antiquated position who affirm one church to be the sole possessor of truth, the only centre of authority. It may seem strange to advise the churches to reconsider many of the ideas built into creed and constitution and to reject all leaders who are such by credit of sitting immovable in the seats of the rabbis, but the progress of Christianity in power and assurance waits upon a new brotherliness which will bring about a new catholicity. Under guides of the right kind the churches will have qualities and distinctions as heretofore, each will be a rendezvous for spirits of a certain order, but frankly confessing each other's right and honour they will press on abreast to scale and possess the uplands of truth.

To be sure something is said of tolerance. But that is a purely political idea. Let it not be so much as named in the assembly of God's people. Does Barak tolerate Deborah? Does Moses tolerate Aaron? Does St. Peter tolerate St. Paul? The disciples of Christ *tolerate* each other, do they? What marvellous largeness of soul! One or two, it appears, have been made sole keepers of the ark but are prepared to tolerate the embarrassing help of well-meaning auxiliaries. Neither charity of that sort nor flabbiness of belief is asked. Let each be strongly persuaded in his own mind of that which he has learned from Christ. But where Christ has not foreclosed inquiry and where sincere

and thoughtful believers differ there is no place for what is called tolerance; the demand is for brotherly fellowship in thought and labour.

Deborah was a mother in Israel, a nursing mother of the people in their spiritual childhood, with a mother's warm heart for the oppressed and weary flock. The nation needed a new birth, and that, by the grace of God, Deborah gave it in the sore travail of her soul. For many a year she suffered, prayed and entreated. Israel had chosen new gods and in serving them was dying to righteousness, dying to Jehovah. Deborah had to pour her own life into the half-dead, and compared to this effort the battle with the Canaanites was but a secondary matter. So is it always. The Divine task is that of the mother-like souls that labour for the quickening of faith and holy service. Great victories of Christian valour, patience and love are never won without that renewal of humanity; and everything is due to those who have guided the ignorant into knowledge, the careless to thought and the weak to strength through years of patient toil. They are not all prophets, not all known to the tribes: of many such the record waits hidden with their God until the day of revealing and rejoicing.

Yet Barak also, the Lightning Chief, has honourable part. When the men are collected, men new-born into life, he can lead them. They are Ironsides under him. He rushes down from Tabor and they at his feet with a vigour nothing can resist. If we have Deborah we shall also have Barak, his army and his victory. The promise is not for women only but for all in the private ways and obscure settlements of life who labour at the making of men. Every Christian has the responsibility and joy of helping to prepare a way for the

coming of Jehovah in some great outburst of faith and righteousness.

2. We contrast next the people who offered themselves willingly, who "jeoparded their lives unto the death upon the high places of the field," and those who for one reason or another held aloof.

With united leaders there is a measure of unity among the tribes. Barak and Deborah summon all who are ready to strike for liberty, and there is a great muster. Yet there might be double the number. Those who refuse to take arms have many pretexts, but the real cause is want of heart. The oppression of Jabin does not much affect some Israelites, and so far as it does they would rather go on paying tribute than risk their lives, rather bear the ills they have than hazard anything in joining Barak. These holding back, the work has to be done by a comparatively small number, a remnant of the nobles and the people.

But a remnant is always found; there are men and women who do not bow the knee to the Baal of worldly fashion, who do not content their souls amid the flesh-pots of low servitude. They have to venture and sacrifice much in a long and varying war, and oftentimes their flesh and heart may almost fail. But a great reward is theirs. While others are spiritless and hopeless they know the zest of life, its real power and joy. They know what believing means, how strong it makes the soul. Their all is in the spiritual kingdom which cannot be moved. God is the portion of their souls, their gladness and glory. Those who stand by and look on while the conflict rages may share to a certain extent in the liberty that is won, for the gains of Christian warfare are not limited, they are for all mankind. There is a wider and better ordered life for

all when this evil custom and that have been overcome, when one Jabin after another ceases to oppress. Yet what is it after all to touch the border of Christian liberty? To the fighters belongs the inheritance itself, an ever-extending conquest, a land of olives and vineyards and streams of living water.

Different tribes are named that sent contingents to the army of Barak. They are typical of different churches, different orders of society that are forward in the campaign of faith. The Hebrews who came most readily at the battle call appear to have belonged to districts where the Canaanite oppression was heavy, the country that lay between Harosheth, the headquarters of Sisera, and Hazor the city of Jabin. So in the Christian struggle of the ages the strenuous part falls to those who suffer from the tyranny of the temporal and see clearly the hopelessness of life without religion. The gospel of Christ is peculiarly precious to men and women whose lot is hard, whose earthly future is clouded. Sacrifices for God's cause are made as a rule by these. In His great purpose, in His deep knowledge of the facts of life, our Lord joined Himself to the poor and left with them a special blessing. It is not that men who dwell in comfort are independent of the gospel, but they are tempted to think themselves so. In proportion as they are fenced in amongst possessions and social claims they are apt, though devout, to miss that very call which is the message of the gospel to them. Well-meaning but absorbed, they can rarely bestir themselves to hear and do until some personal calamity or public disaster awakens them to the truth of things. The steady support of Christian ordinances and work in our day is largely the honour of people who have their full share

in the struggle for earthly necessaries or a humble standing in the ranks of the independent. The paradox is real and striking; it claims the attention of those who vainly dream that a comfortable society would certainly become Christian, as effect follows cause. While the religion of Christ makes for justice and temporal well-being, blessing even the unbeliever, while it leads the way to a high standard of social order, these things remain of no value in themselves to men unspiritual: it holds true that man can never live by bread alone, but by the words which proceed out of the mouth of God. And there are forces at work among us on behalf of the Divine counsel that shall not fail to maintain the struggle necessary to the discipline and growth of souls.

The real army of faith is largely drawn from the ranks of the toilers and the heavy laden. Yet not entirely. We reckon many and fine exceptions. There are rich who are less worldly than those who have little. Many whose lot lies far from the shadow of tyranny in green and pleasant valleys are first to hear and quickest to answer every call from the Captain of the Lord's host. Their possessions are nothing to them. In the spiritual battle all is spent, knowledge, influence, wealth, life. And if you look for the highest examples of Christianity, a faith pure, keen and lovely, a generosity that most clearly reveals the Master, a passion for truth consuming all lower regards, you will find them where culture has done its best for the mind and the bounty of providence has kindled a gracious humility and an abounding gentleness of heart. The tawdry vanities of their fellows in rank and wealth seem what they are to these, the gaudy toys of children who have not yet seen the glory and the goal of life.

And how can men and women hear the clarion of the Christian war ringing over the valleys of degradation and fear, see the Divine contest surging through the land, and not perceive that here and here only is life? Men play at statecraft and grow cold as they intrigue; they play at financing and become ciphers in a monstrous sum; they toil at pleasure till Satan himself might pity them, for at least he has a purpose to serve. All the while there is offered to them the vigour, the buoyancy, the glow of an ambition and a service in which no spirit tires and no heart withers. Passing strange it is that so few noble, so few mighty, so few wise hear the keen cry from the cross as one of life and power.

Among the tribes that held aloof from the great conflict several are specially named. Messengers have gone to the land of Reuben beyond Jordan, and carried the fiery cross through Bashan. Dan has been summoned and Asher from the haven of the sea. But these have not responded. Reuben indeed has searchings of heart. Some of the people remember the old promise made at Shittim in the plain of Moab, that they would help their brethren who crossed into Canaan, never refusing assistance till the land was fully possessed. Moses had solemnly charged them with that duty, and they had bound themselves in covenant: "As the Lord hath said unto thy servants, so will we do." Could anything have been more seriously, more decisively undertaken? Yet, when this hour of need came, though the duty lay upon the conscience nothing was done. Along the watercourses of Gilead and Bashan there were flocks to tend, to protect from the Amalekites and Midianites of the desert who would be sure to make a raid in the absence of the fighting men. To

Asher and Dan the reference is perhaps somewhat ironical. The "ships" for trade, the "haven of the sea," were never much to these tribes, and their maritime ambition made an unworthy excuse. They had perhaps a little fishing, some small trade on the coast, and petty as the gain was it filled their hearts. Asher "abode by his creeks."

It is not to a religious festival that Deborah and Barak have called the tribes. It is to serious and dangerous duty. Yet the call of duty should come with more power than any invitation even to spiritual enjoyment. The great religious gathering has its use, its charm. We know the attraction of the crowded convocation in which Christian hope and enthusiasm are re-kindled by stirring words and striking instances, faith rising high as it views the wide mission of gospel truth and hears from eloquent lips the story of a modern day of Pentecost. To many, because their own spiritual life burns dull, the daily and weekly routine of things becomes empty, vain, unsatisfying. In the common round even of valued religious exercise the heat and promise of Christianity seem to be lacking. In the convention they appear to be realized as nowhere else, and the persuasion that God may be felt there in a special manner is laying hold of Christian people. They are right in their eager desire to be borne along with the flood of redeeming grace; but we have need to ask what the life of faith is, how it is best nourished. To have a personal share in God's controversy with evil, to have a place however obscure in the actual struggle of truth with falsehood,—this alone gives confidence in the result and power in believing. Those who are in contact with spiritual reality because they have their own testimony to bear, their own watch to

keep at some outpost, find stimulus in the urgency of duty and exultation in the consciousness of service. Men often seek in public gatherings what they can only find in the private ways of effort and endurance; they seek the joy of harvest when they should be at the labour of sowing; they would fain be cheered by the song of victory when they should be roused by the trumpet of battle.

And the result is that where spiritual work waits to be done there are but few to do it. Examine the state of any Christian church, reckon up those who are deeply interested in its efficiency, who make sacrifices of time and means, and set against these the half-hearted, who ignobly accept the religious provision made for them and perhaps complain that it is not so good as they would like, that progress is not so rapid as they think it might be,—the one class far outnumbers the other. As in Israel twice or three times as many might have responded to Barak's call, so in every church the resolute, the energetic and devoted are few compared with those who are capable of energy and devotion. It is sometimes maintained that the worship of goodness and the Christian ideal command the minds of men more to-day than ever they did, and proof seems ready to hand. But, after all, is it not religious taste rather than reverence that grows? Self-culture leads many to a certain admiration of Christ and a form of discipleship. Christian worship is enjoyed and Christian philanthropy also, but when the spiritual freedom of mankind calls for some effort of the soul and life, we see what religion means—a wave of the hand instead of enthusiasm, a guinea subscription instead of thoughtful service. Is it a Christian or a selfish culture which is content

with fragmentary concessions and complacent patronage where the claims of social "inferiors" are concerned? That there is a wide diffusion of religious feeling is clear enough; but in many respects it is mere dilettantism.

Notice the history of the tribes that lag behind in the day of the Lord's summons. What do we hear of Reuben after this? "Unstable as water thou shalt not excel." Along with Gad Reuben possessed a splendid country, but these two faded away into a sort of barbarism, scarcely maintaining their separateness from the wild races of the desert. Asher in like manner suffered from the contact with Phœnicia and lost touch with the more faithful tribes. So it is always. Those who shirk religious duty lose the strength and dignity of religion. Though greatly favoured in place and gifts they fall into that spiritual impotence which means defeat and extinction.

"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It is a stern judgment upon those whose active assistance was humanly speaking necessary in the day of battle. The men only held back, held back in doubt, supposing that it was vain for Hebrews to fling themselves against the iron chariots of Sisera. Were they not prudent, looking at the matter all round? Why should a curse so heavy be pronounced on men who only sought to save their lives? The reply is that secular history curses such men, those of Sparta for example to whom Athens sent in vain when the battle of Marathon was impending; and further that Christ has declared the truth which is for all time, "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." Erasmus was a wise

man; yet he made the great blunder. He saw clearly the errors of Romanism and the miserable bondage in which it kept the souls of men, and if he had joined the reformers his judgment and learning would have become part of the world's progressive life. But he held back doubting, criticising, a friend to the Reformation but not an apostle of it. Admire as we may the wit, the reasoner, the philosopher, there must always be severe judgment of one who professing to love truth declared that he had no inclination to die for it. There are many who without the intellect of Erasmus would fain be thought catholic in his company. Large is the family of Meroz, and little thought have they of any ban lying upon them. Is it a fanciful danger, a mere error of opinion without any peril in it, to which we point here? People think so; young men especially think so and drift on until the day of service is past and they find themselves under the contempt of man and the judgment of Christ. "Lord, when saw we Thee a stranger or in prison and did not minister unto Thee?" "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

3. Jael, a type of the unscrupulous helpers of a good cause.

Long has the error prevailed that religion can be helped by using the world's weapons, by acting in the temper and spirit of the world. Of that mischievous falsehood have been born all the pride and vainglory, the rivalries and persecutions that darken the past of Christendom, surviving in strange and pitiful forms to the present day. If we shudder at the treachery in the deed of Jael, what shall we say of that which through many a year sent victims to inquisition-dungeons and to the stake in the name of Christ? And what shall we say now of that moral assassination

which in one tent and another is thought no sin against humanity, but a service of God? Among us are too many who suffer wounds keen and festering that have been given in the house of their friends, yea, in the name of the one Lord and Master. The battle of truth is a frank and honourable fight, served at no point by what is false or proud or low. To an enemy a Christian should be chivalrous and surely no less to a brother. Granting that a man is in error, he needs a physician not an executioner; he needs an example not a dagger. How much farther do we get by the methods of opprobrium and cruelty, the innuendo and the whisper of suspicion? Besides, it is not the Siseras to-day who are dealt with after this manner. It is the "schismatic" within the camp on whom some Jael falls with a hammer and a nail. If a church cannot stand by itself, approved to the consciences of men, it certainly will not be helped by a return to the temper of barbarism and the craft of the world. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the casting down of strongholds."

X.

THE DESERT HORDES; AND THE MAN AT OPHRAH.

JUDGES vi. 1-14.

JABIN king of Canaan defeated and his nine hundred chariots turned into ploughshares we might expect Israel to make at last a start in its true career. The tribes have had their third lesson and should know the peril of infidelity. Without God they are weak as water. Will they not bind themselves now in a confederacy of faith, suppress Baal and Astarte worship by stringent laws and turn their hearts to God and duty? Not yet: not for more than a century. The true reformer has yet to come. Deborah's work is certainly not in vain. She passes through the land administering justice, commanding the destruction of heathen altars. The people leave their occupations and gather in crowds to hear her; they shout, in answer to her appeals, Jehovah is our King. The Levites are called to minister at the shrines. For a time there is something like religion along with improving circumstances. But the tide does not rise long nor far.

Some twenty years have passed, and what is to be seen going on throughout the land? The Hebrews have addressed themselves vigorously to their work in field and town. Everywhere they are breaking up new

ground, building houses, repairing roads, organising traffic. But they are also falling into the old habit of friendly intercourse with Canaanites, talking with them over the prospects of the crops, joining in their festivals of new moon and harvest. In their own cities the old inhabitants of the land sacrifice to Baal and gather about the Asherim. Earnest Israelites are indignant and call for action, but the mass of the people are so taken up with their prosperity that they cannot be roused. Peace and comfort in the lower region seem better than contention for anything higher. In the centre of Palestine there is a coalition of Hebrew and Canaanite cities, with Shechem at their head, which recognize Baal as their patron and worship him as the master of their league. And in the northern tribes generally Jehovah has scant acknowledgment; the people see no great task He has given them to do. If they live and multiply and inherit the land they reckon their function as His nation to be fulfilled.

It is a temptation common to men to consider their own existence and success a sort of Divine end in serving which they do all that God requires of them. The business of mere living and making life comfortable absorbs them so that even faith finds its only use in promoting their own happiness. The circle of the year is filled with occupations. When the labour of the field is over there are the houses and cities to enlarge, to improve and furnish with means of safety and enjoyment. One task done and the advantage of it felt, another presents itself. Industry takes new forms and burdens still more the energies of men. Education, art, science become possible and in turn make their demands. But all may be for self, and God may be thought of merely as the great Patron satisfied with

His tithes. In this way the impulses and hopes of faith are made the ministers of egoism, and as a national thing the maintenance of law, goodwill, and a measure of purity may seem to furnish religion with a sufficient object. But this is far from enough. Let worship be refined and elaborated, let great temples be built and thronged, let the arts of music and painting be employed in raising devotion to its highest pitch—still if nothing beyond self is seen as the aim of existence, if national Christianity realizes no duty to the world outside, religion must decay. Neither a man nor a people can be truly religious without the missionary spirit, and that spirit must constantly shape individual and collective life. Among ourselves worship would petrify and faith wither were it not for the tasks the church has undertaken at home and abroad. But half-understood, half-discharged, these duties keep us alive. And it is because the great mission of Christians to the world is not even yet comprehended that we have so much practical atheism. When less care and thought are expended on the forms of worship and the churches address themselves to the true ritual of our religion, carrying out the redeeming work of our Saviour, there will be new fervour; unbelief will be swept away.

Israel losing sight of its mission and its destiny felt no need of faith and lost it; and with the loss of faith came loss of vigour and alertness as on other occasions. Having no sense of a common purpose great enough to demand their unity the Hebrews were again unable to resist enemies, and this time the Midianites and other wild tribes of the eastern desert found their opportunity. First some bands of them came at the time of harvest and made raids on the cultivated districts. But year by year they ventured

farther in increasing numbers. Finally they brought their tents and families, their flocks and herds, and took possession.

In the case of all who fall away from the purpose of life the means of bringing failure home to them and restoring the balance of justice are always at hand. Let a men neglect his fields and nature is upon him; weeds choke his crops, his harvests diminish, poverty comes like an armed man. In trade likewise carelessness brings retribution. So in the case of Israel: although the Canaanites had been subdued other foes were not far away. And the business of this nation was of so sacred a kind that neglect of it meant great moral fault and every fresh relapse into earthliness and sensuality after a revival of religion implied more serious guilt. We find accordingly a proportionate severity in the punishment. Now the nation is chastised with whips, but next time it is with scorpions. Now the iron chariots of Sisera hold the land in terror; then hosts of marauders spread like locusts over the country, insatiable, all-devouring. Do the Hebrews think that careful tilling of their fields and the making of wine and oil are their chief concern? In that they shall be undeceived. Not mainly to be good husbandmen and vine-dressers are they set here, but to be a light in the midst of the nations. If they cease to shine they shall no longer enjoy.

It was by the higher fords of Jordan, perhaps north of the Sea of Galilee, that the Midianites fell on western Canaan. Under their two great emirs Zebah and Zalmunna, who seem to have held a kind of barbaric state, troops of riders on swift horses and dromedaries swept the shore of the lake and burst into the plain of Jezreel. There were no doubt many skirmishes

between their squadrons and the men of Naphtali and Manasseh. But one horde of the invaders followed another so quickly and their attacks were so sudden and fierce that at length resistance became impossible, the Hebrews had to betake themselves to the heights and dwell in the caves and rocks. Once in the desert under Moses they had been more than a match for these Arabs. Now, although on vantage ground moral and natural, fighting for their hearths and homes behind the breastwork of lake, river and mountain, they are completely routed.

Between the circumstances of this oppressed nation and the present state of the church there is a wide interval, and in a sense the contrast is striking. Is not the Christianity of our time strong and able to hold its own? Is not the mood of many churches of the present day properly that of elation? As year after year reports of numerical increase and larger contributions are made, as finer buildings are raised for the purposes of worship and work at home and abroad is carried on more efficiently, is it not impossible to trace any resemblance between the state of Israel during the Midianite oppression and the state of religion now? Why should there be any fear that Baal-worship or other idolatry should weaken the tribes, or that marauders from the desert should settle in their land?

And yet the condition of things to-day is not quite unlike that of Israël at the time we are considering. There are Canaanites who dwell in the land and carry on their debasing worship. These too are days when guerilla troops of naturalism, nomads of the primæval desert, are sweeping the region of faith. Reckless and irresponsible talk in periodicals and on platforms; novels, plays and verses often as clever as they are

unscrupulous are incidents of the invasion, and it is well advanced. Not for the first time is a raid of this kind made on the territory of faith, but the serious thing now is the readiness to give way, the want of heart and power to resist that we observe in family life and in society as well as in literature. Where resistance ought to be eager and firm it is often ignorant, hesitating, lukewarm. Perhaps the invasion must become more confident and more injurious before it rouses the people of God to earnest and united action. Perhaps those who will not submit may have to betake themselves to the caves of the mountains while the new barbarism establishes itself in the rich plain. It has almost come to this in some countries; and it may be that the pride of those who have been content to cultivate their vineyards for themselves alone, the security of those who have too easily concluded that fighting was over shall yet be startled by some great disaster.

"Israel was brought very low because of Midian." A traveller's picture of the present state of things on the eastern frontier of Bashan enables us to understand the misery to which the tribes were reduced by seven years of rapine. "Not only is the country—plain and hill-side alike—chequered with fenced fields, but groves of fig-trees are here and there seen and terraced vineyards still clothe the sides of some of the hills. These are neglected and wild but not fruitless. They produce great quantities of figs and grapes which are rifled year after year by the Bedawîn in their periodical raids. Nowhere on earth is there such a melancholy example of tyranny, rapacity and misrule as here. Fields, pastures, vineyards, houses, villages, cities are all alike deserted and waste. Even

the few inhabitants that have hid themselves among the rocky fastnesses and mountain defiles drag out a miserable existence, oppressed by robbers of the desert on the one hand and robbers of the government on the other." The Midianites of Gideon's time acted the part both of tyrants and depredators. They "left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep nor ox nor ass. They entered into the land for to destroy it."

"And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord"; the prodigals bethought them of their Father. Having come to the husks they remembered Him who fed His people in the desert. Again the wheel has revolved and from the lowest point there is an upward movement. The tribes of God look once more towards the hills from whence their help cometh. And here is seen the importance of that faith which had passed into the nation's life. Although it was not of a very spiritual kind, yet it preserved in the heart of the people a recuperative power. The majority knew little more of Jehovah than His name. But the name suggested availing succour. They turned to the Awful Name, repeated it and urged their need. Here and there one saw God as the infinitely righteous and holy and added to the wail of the ignorant a more devout appeal, recognizing the evils under which the people groaned as punitive and knowing that the very God to Whom they cried had brought the Midianites upon them. In the prayer of such a one there was an outlook towards holier and nobler life. But even in the case of the ignorant the cry to One higher than the highest had help in it. For when that bitter cry was raised self-glorifying had ceased and piety begun.

Ignorant indeed is much of the faith that still expresses itself in so-called Christian prayer, almost

as ignorant as that of the disconsolate Hebrew tribes. The moral purpose of discipline, the Divine ordinances of defeat and pain and affliction are a mystery unread. The man in extremity does not know why his hour of abject fear has come, nor see that one by one all the stays of his selfish life have been removed by a Divine hand. His cry is that of a foolish child. Yet is it not true that such a prayer revives hope and gives new energy to the languid life? It may be many years since prayer was tried, not perhaps since he who is now past his meridian knelt at a mother's knee. Still as he names the name of God, as he looks upward, there comes with the dim vision of an Omnipotent Helper within reach of his cry the sense of new possibilities, the feeling that amidst the miry clay or the heaving waves there is something firm and friendly on which he may yet stand. It is a striking fact as to any kind of religious belief, even the most meagre, that it does for man what nothing else can do. Prayer must cease, we are told, for it is mere superstition. Without denying that much of what is called prayer is an expression of egotism, we must demand an explanation of the unique value it has in human life and a sufficient substitute for the habit of appeal to God. Those who would deprive us of prayer must first re-make man, for to the strong and enlightened prayer is necessary as well as to the weak and ignorant. The Heavenly is the only hope of the earthly. That we understand God is, after all, not the chief thing: but does He know us? Is He there, above yet beside us, for ever?

The first answer to the cry of Israel came in the message of a prophet, one who would have been despised by the nation in its self-sufficient mood but

now obtained a hearing. His words brought instruction and made it possible for faith to move and work along a definite line. Through man's struggle God helps him; through man's thought and resolve God speaks to him. He is already converted when he believes enough to pray, and from this point faith saves by animating and guiding the strenuous will. The ignorant abject people of God learns from the prophet that something is to be done. There is a command, repeated from Sinai, against the worship of heathen gods, then a call to love the true God the Deliverer of Israel. Faith is to become life, and life faith. The name of Jehovah which has stood for one power among others is clearly re-affirmed as that of the One Divine Being, the only Object of adoration. Israel is convicted of sin and set on the way of obedience.

The answer to prayer lies very near to him who cries for salvation. He has not to move a step. He has but to hear the inner voice of conscience. Is there a sense of neglect of duty, a sense of disobedience, of faults committed? The first movement towards salvation is set up in that conviction and in the hope that the evil now seen may be remedied. Forgiveness is implied in this hope, and it will become assured as the hope grows strong. The mistake is often made of supposing that answer to prayer does not come till peace is found. In reality the answer begins when the will is bent towards a better life, though that change may be accompanied by the deepest sorrow and self-humiliation. A man who earnestly reproaches himself for despising and disobeying God has already received the grace of the redeeming Spirit.

But to Israel's cry there was another answer. When

repentance was well begun and the tribes turned from the heathen rites which separated them from each other and from Divine thoughts, freedom again became possible and God raised up a liberator. Repentance indeed was not thorough; therefore a complete national reformation was not accomplished. Yet as against Midian, a mere horde of marauders, the balance of righteousness and power inclined now in behalf of Israel. The time was ripe and in the providence of God the fit man received his call.

South-west from Shechem, among the hills of Manasseh at Ophrah of the Abiezrites, lived a family that had suffered keenly at the hands of Midian. Some members of the family had been slain near Tabor, and the rest had as a cause of war not only the constant robberies from field and homestead but also the duty of blood-revenge. The deepest sense of injury, the keenest resentment fell to the share of one Gideon, son of Joash, a young man of nobler temper than most Hebrews of the time. His father was head of a Thousand; and as he was an idolater the whole clan joined him in sacrificing to the Baal whose altar stood within the boundary of his farm. Already Gideon appears to have turned with loathing from that base worship; and he was pondering earnestly the cause of the pitiful state into which Israel had fallen. But the circumstances perplexed him. He was not able to account for facts in accordance with faith.

In a retired place on the hillside where a winepress has been fashioned in a hollow of the rocks we first see the future deliverer of Israel. His task for the day is that of threshing out some wheat so that, as soon as possible, the grain may be hid from the Midianites; and he is busy with the flail, thinking

deeply, watching carefully as he plies the instrument with a sense of irksome restraint. Look at him and you are struck with his stalwart proportions and his bearing: he is "like the son of a king." Observe more closely and the fire of a troubled yet resolute soul will be seen in his eye. He represents the best Hebrew blood, the finest spirit and intelligence of the nation; but as yet he is a strong man bound. He would fain do something to deliver Israel; he would fain trust Jehovah to sustain him in striking a blow for liberty; but the way is not clear. Indignation and hope are baffled.

In a pause of his work, as he glances across the valley with anxious eye, suddenly he sees under an oak a stranger sitting staff in hand, as if he had sought rest for a little in the shade. Gideon scans the visitor keenly, but finding no cause for alarm bends again to his labour. The next time he looks up the stranger is beside him and words of salutation are falling from his lips—"Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." To Gideon the words did not seem so strange as they would have seemed to some. Yet what did they mean? Jehovah with him? Strength and courage he is aware of. Sympathy with his fellow-Israelites and the desire to help them he feels. But these do not seem to him proofs of Jehovah's presence. And as for his father's house and the Hebrew people, God seems far from them. Harried and oppressed they are surely God-forsaken. Gideon can only wonder at the unseasonable greeting and ask what it means.

Unconsciousness of God is not rare. Men do not attribute their regret over wrong, their faint longing for the right to a spiritual presence within them and a Divine working. The Unseen appears so remote, man

appears so shut off from intercourse with any supernatural Cause or Source that he fails to link his own strain of thought with the Eternal. The word of God is nigh him even in his heart, God is "closer to him than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." Hope, courage, will, life—these are Divine gifts, but he does not know it. Even in our Christian times the old error which makes God external, remote, entirely aloof from human experience survives and is more common than true faith. We conceive ourselves separated from the Divine, with springs of thought, purpose and power in our own being, whereas there is in us no absolute origin of power moral intellectual or physical. We live and move in God: He is our Source and our Stay, and our being is shot through and through with rays of the Eternal. The prophetic word spoken in our ear is not more assuredly from God than the pure wish or unselfish hope that frames itself in our minds or the stern voice of conscience heard in the soul. As for the trouble into which we fall, that too, did we understand aright, is a mark of God's providential care. Would we err without discipline? Would we be ineffective and have no bracing? Would we follow lies and enjoy a false peace? Would we refuse the Divine path to strength yet never feel the sorrow of the weak? Are these the proofs of God's presence our ignorance would desire? Then indeed we imagine an unholy one, an unfaithful one upon the throne of the universe. But God has no favourites; He does not rule like a despot of earth for courtiers and an aristocracy. In righteousness and for righteousness, for eternal truth He works, and for that His people must endure.

"Jehovah is with thee:" so ran the salutation.

Gideon thinking of Jehovah does not wonder to hear His name. But full of doubts natural to one so little instructed he feels himself bound to express them: "Why is all this evil befallen us? Hath not Jehovah cast us off and delivered us into the hand of Midian?" Unconstrainedly, plainly as man to man Gideon speaks, the burdensome thought of his people's misery overcoming the strangeness of the fact that in a God-forsaken land any one should care to speak of things like these. Yet momentarily as the conversation proceeds there grows in Gideon's soul a feeling of awe, a new and penetrating idea. The look fastened upon him conveys beside the human strain of will a suggestion of highest authority; the words, "Go in this thy might and save Israel, have not I sent thee?" kindle in his heart a vivid faith. Laid hold of, lifted above himself, the young man is made aware at last of the Living God, His presence, His will. Jehovah's representative has done his mediatorial work. Gideon desires a sign; but his wish is a note of habitual caution, not of disbelief, and in the sacrifice he finds what he needs.

Now, why insist as some do on that which is not affirmed in the text? The form of the narrative must be interpreted: and it does not require us to suppose that Jehovah Himself, incarnate, speaking human words, is upon the scene. The call is from Him, and indeed Gideon has already a prepared heart, or he would not listen to the messenger. But seven times in the brief story the word *Malakh* marks a commissioned servant as clearly as the other word Jehovah marks the Divine will and revelation. After the man of God has vanished from the hill swiftly, strangely, in the manner of his coming, Gideon remains alive to Jehovah's immediate

presence and voice as he never was before. Humble and shrinking—"forasmuch as I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face"—he yet hears the Divine benediction fall from the sky, and following that a fresh and immediate summons. Whether from the tabernacle at Shiloh an acknowledged prophet came to the brooding Abiezrite, or the visitor was one who concealed his own name and haunt that Jehovah might be the more impressively recognised, it matters not. The angel of the Lord made Gideon thrill with a call to highest duty, opened his ears to heavenly voices and then left him. After this he felt God to be with himself.

"The Lord looked upon Gideon and said, Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee?" It was a summons to stern and anxious work, and the young man could not be sanguine. He had considered and re-considered the state of things so long, he had so often sought a way of liberating his people and found none that he needed a clear indication how the effort was to be made. Would the tribes follow him, the youngest of an obscure family in Manasseh? And how was he to stir, how to gather the people? He builds an altar, Jehovah-shalom; he enters into covenant with the Eternal in high and earnest resolution, and with a sudden flash of prophet sight he sees the first thing to do. Baal's altar in the high place of Ophrah must be overthrown. Thereafter it will be known what faith and courage are to be found in Israel.

It is the call of God that ripens a life into power, resolve, fruitfulness—the call and the response to it. Continually the Bible urges upon us this great truth, that through the keen sense of a close personal rela-

tion to God and of duty owing to Him the soul grows and comes to its own. Our human personality is created in that way and in no other. There are indeed lives which are not so inspired and yet appear strong; an ingenious resolute selfishness gives them momentum. But this individuality is akin to that of ape or tiger; it is a part of the earth-force in yielding to which a man forfeits his proper being and dignity. Look at Napoleon, the supreme example in history of this failure. A great genius, a striking character? Only in the carnal region, for human personality is moral, spiritual, and the most triumphant cunning does not make a man; while on the other hand from a very moderate endowment put to the glorious usury of God's service will grow a soul clear, brave and firm, precious in the ranks of life. Let a human being, however ignorant and low, hear and answer the Divine summons and in that place a man appears, one who stands related to the source of strength and light. And when a man roused by such a call feels responsibility for his country, for religion, the hero is astir. Something will be done for which mankind waits.

But heroism is rare. We do not often commune with God nor listen with eager souls for His word. The world is always in need of men, but few appear. The usual is worshipped; the pleasure and profit of the day occupy us; even the sight of the cross does not rouse the heart. Speak, Heavenly Word! and quicken our clay. Let the thunders of Sinai be heard again, and then the still small voice that penetrates the soul. So shall heroism be born and duty done, and the dead shall live.

XI.

GIDEON, ICONOCLAST AND REFORMER.

JUDGES vi. 15-32.

"THE Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour:"—so has the prophetic salutation come to the young man at the threshing-floor of Ophrah. It is a personal greeting and call—"with thee"—just what a man needs in the circumstances of Gideon. There is a nation to be saved, and a human leader must act for Jehovah. Is Gideon fit for so great a task? A wise humility, a natural fear have held him under the yoke of daily toil until this hour. Now the needed signs are given; his heart leaps up in the pulses of a longing which God approves and blesses. The criticism of kinsfolk, the suspicious carping of neighbours, the easily affronted pride of greater families no longer crush patriotic desire and overbear yearning faith. The Lord is with thee, Gideon, youngest son of Joash, the toiler in obscure fields. Go in this thy might; be strong in Jehovah.

But the assurance must widen if it is to satisfy. With me—that is a great thing for Gideon; that gives him free air to breathe and strength to use the sword. But can it be true? Can God be with one only in the land? He seems to have forsaken Israel and sold His people to the oppressor. Unless He returns to all in

forgiveness and grace nothing can be done; a renewal of the nation is the first thing, and this Gideon desires. Comfort for himself, freedom from Midianite vexation for himself and his father's house would be no satisfaction if, all around, he saw Israel still crushed under heathen hordes. To have a hand in delivering his people from danger and sorrow is Gideon's craving. The assurance given to himself personally is welcome because in it there is a sound as of the beginning of Israel's redemption. Yet "if the LORD be with us, why then is all this befallen us?" God cannot be with the tribes, for they are harassed and spoiled by enemies, they lie prone before the altars of Baal.

There is here an example of largeness in heart and mind which we ought not to miss, especially because it sets before us a principle often unrecognised. It is clear enough that Gideon could not enjoy freedom unless his country was free, for no man can be safe in an enslaved land; but many fail to see that spiritual redemption in like manner cannot be enjoyed by one unless others are moving towards the light. Truly salvation is personal at first and personal at last; but it is never an individual affair only. Each for himself must hear and answer the Divine call to repentance; each as a moral unit must enter the strait gate, press along the narrow way of life, agonize and overcome. But the redemption of one soul is part of a vast redeeming purpose, and the fibres of each life are interwoven with those of other lives far and wide. Spiritual brotherhood is a fact but faintly typified by the brotherhood of the Hebrews, and the struggling soul to-day, like Gideon's long ago, must know God as the Saviour of all men before a personal hope can be enjoyed worth the having. As Gideon showed himself to have the

Lord with him by a question charged not with individual anxiety but with keen interest in the nation, so a man now is seen to have the Spirit of God as he exhibits a passion for the regeneration of the world. Salvation is enlargement of soul, devotion to God and to man for the sake of God. If anyone thinks he is saved while he bears no burdens for others, makes no steady effort to liberate souls from the tyranny of the false and the vile, he is in fatal error. The salvation of Christ plants always in men and women His mind, His law of life, Who is the Brother and Friend of all.

And the church of Christ must be filled with His Spirit, animated by His law of life, or be unworthy the name. It exists to unite men in the quest and realization of highest thought and purest activity. The church truly exists for all men, not simply for those who appear to compose it. Salvation and peace are with the church as with the individual believer, but only as her heart is generous, her spirit simple and unselfish. Doubtful and distressed as Gideon was the church of Christ should never be, for to her has been whispered the secret that the Abiezrite had not read, how the Lord is in the oppression and pain of the people, in the sorrow and the cloud. Nor is a church to suppose that salvation can be hers while she thinks of any outside with the least touch of Pharisaism, denying their share in Christ. Better no visible church than one claiming exclusive possession of truth and grace; better no church at all than one using the name of Christ for privilege and excommunication, restricting the fellowship of life to its own enclosure.

But with utmost generosity and humaneness goes the clear perception that God's service is the sternest of campaigns, beginning with resolute protest and

decisive deed, and Gideon must rouse himself to strike for Israel's liberty first against the idol-worship of his own village. There stands the altar of Baal, the symbol of Israel's infidelity; there beside it the abominable Asherah, the sign of Israel's degradation. Already he has thought of demolishing these, but has never summoned courage, never seen that the result would justify him. For such a deed there is a time, and before the time comes the bravest man can only reap discomfiture. Now, with the warrant in his soul, the duty on his conscience, Gideon can make assault on a hateful superstition.

The idolatrous altar and false worship of one's own clan, of one's own family—these need courage to overturn and, more than courage, a ripeness of time and a Divine call. A man must be sure of himself and his motives, for one thing, before he takes upon him to be the corrector of errors that have seemed truth to his fathers and are maintained by his friends. Suppose people are actually worshipping a false god, a world-power which has long held rule among them. If one would act the part of iconoclast the question is, By what right? Is he himself clear of illusion and idolatry? Has he a better system to put in place of the old? He may be acting in mere bravado and self-display, flourishing opinions which have less sincerity than those which he assails. There were men in Israel who had no commission and could have claimed no right to throw down Baal's altar, and taking upon them such a deed would have had short shrift at the hands of the people of Ophrah. And so there are plenty among us who if they set up to be judges of their fellow-men and of beliefs which they call false, even when these are false, deserve simply to be put down with a strong

hand. There are voices, professing to be those of zealous reformers, whose every word and tone are insults. The men need to go and learn the first lessons of truth, modesty and earnestness. And this principle applies all round—to many who assail modern errors as well as to many who assail established beliefs. On the one hand, are men anxious to uphold the true faith? It is well. But anxiety and the best of motives do not qualify them to attack science, to denounce all rationalism as godless. We want defenders of the faith who have a Divine calling to the task in the way of long study and a heavenly fairness of mind, so that they shall not offend and hurt religion more by their ignorant vehemence than they help it by their zeal. On the other hand, by what authority do they speak who sneer at the ignorance of faith and would fain demolish the altars of the world? It is no slight equipment that is needed. Fluent sarcasm, confident worldliness, even a large acquaintance with the dogmas of science will not suffice. A man needs to prove himself a wise and humane thinker, he needs to know by experience and deep sympathy those perpetual wants of our race which Christ knew and met to the uttermost. Some facile admiration of Jesus of Nazareth does not give the right to free criticism of His life and words, or of the faith based upon them. And if the plea is a rare respect for truth, an unusual fidelity to fact, humanity will still ask of its would-be liberator on what fields he has won his rank or what yoke he has borne. Successful men especially will find it difficult to convince the world that they have a right to strike at the throne of Him who stood alone before the Roman Pilate and died on the Cross.

Gideon was not unfit to render high service. He

was a young man tried in humble duty and disciplined in common tasks, shrewd but not arrogant, a person of clear mind and a patriot. The people of the farm and a good many in Ophrah had learned to trust him and were prepared to follow when he struck out a new path. He had God's call and also his own past to help him. Hence when Gideon began his undertaking, although to attempt it in broad day would have been rash and he must act under cover of darkness, he soon found ten men to give their aid. No doubt he could in a manner command them, for they were his servants. Still a business of the kind he proposed was likely to rouse their superstitious fears, and he had to conquer these. It was also sure to involve the men in some risk, and he must have been able to give them confidence in the issue. This he did, however, and they went forth. Very quietly the altar of Baal was demolished and the great wooden mast, hateful symbol of Astarte, was cut down and split in pieces. Such was the first act in the revolution.

We observe, however, that Gideon does not leave Ophrah without an altar and a sacrifice. Destroy one system without laying the foundation of another that shall more than equal it in essential truth and practical power, and what sort of deliverance have you effected? Men will rightly execrate you. It is no reformation that leaves the heart colder, the life barer and darker than before; and those who move in the night against superstition must be able to speak in the day of a Living God who will vindicate His servants. It has been said over and over again and must yet be repeated, to overturn merely is no service. They that break down need some vision at least of a building up, and it is the new edifice that is the chief thing. The world

of thought to-day is infested with critics and destroyers and may well be tired of them. It is too much in need of constructors to have any thanks to spare for new Voltaires and Humes. Let us admit that demolition is the necessity of some hours. We look back on the ruins of Bastilles and temples that served the uses of tyranny, and even in the domain of faith there have been fortresses to throw down and ramparts that made evil separations among men. But destruction is not progress; and if the end of modern thought is to be agnosticism, the denial of all faith and all ideals, then we are simply on the way to something not a whit better than primeval ignorance.

The morning sun showed the gap upon the hill where the symbols had stood of Baal and Astarte, and soon like an angry swarm of bees the people were buzzing round the scattered stones of the old altar and the rough new pile with its smoking sacrifice. Where was he who ventured to rebuke the city? Very indignant, very pious are these false Israelites. They turn on Joash with the fierce demand, "Bring out thy son that he may die." But the father too has come to a decision. We get a hint of the same nature as Gideon's, slow, but firm when once roused; and if anything would rouse a man it would be this brutal passion, this sudden outbreak of cruelty nursed by heathen custom, his own conscience meanwhile testifying that Gideon was right. Tush! says Joash, will you plead for Baal? Will you save him? Is it necessary for you to defend one whom you have worshipped as Lord of heaven? Let him ply his lightnings if he has any. I am tired of this Baal who has no principles and is good only for feast-days. He that pleads for Baal, let him be the man to die.—Unexpected

apology, serious too and unanswerable. Conscience that seemed dead is suddenly awakened and carries all before it. There is a quick conversion of the whole town because one man has acted decisively and another speaks strong words which cannot be gainsaid. To be sure Joash uses a threat—hints something of taking a very short method with those who still protest for Baal; and that helps conversion. But it is force against force, and men cannot object who have themselves talked of killing. By a rapid popular impulse Gideon is justified, and with the new name Jerubbaal he is acknowledged as a leader in Manasseh.

False religion is not always so easily exposed and upset. Truth may be so mixed with the error of a system that the moral sense is confused and faith clings to the follies and lies conjoined with the truth. And when we look at Judaism in contact with Christianity, at Romanism in contact with the Protestant spirit, we see how difficult it may be to liberate faith. The Apostle Paul wielding the weapon of a singular and keen eloquence cannot overcome the Pharisaism of his countrymen. At Antioch, at Iconium he does his utmost with scant success. The Protestant reformation did not so swiftly and thoroughly establish itself in every European country as in Scotland. Where there is no pressure of outward circumstances forcing new religious ideas upon men there must be all the more a spirit of independent thought if any salutary change is to be made in creed and worship. Either there must be men of Berea who search the Scriptures daily, men of Zurich and Berne with the energy of free citizens, or reformation must wait on some political emergency. And in effect conscience rarely has free play, since men are seldom manly but

more or less like sheep. Hence the value, as things go in this world, of leaders like Joash, princes like Luther's Elector, who give the necessary push to the undecided and check forward opponents by a significant warning. It is not the ideal way of reforming the world, but it has often answered well enough within limits. There are also cases in which the threats of the enemy have done good service, as when the appearance of the Spanish Armada on the English coast did more to confirm the Protestantism of the country than many years of peaceful argument. In truth were there not occasionally something like master-strokes in Providence the progress of humanity would be almost imperceptible. Men and nations are urged on although they have no great desire to advance; they are committed to a voyage and cannot return; they are caught in currents and must go where the currents bear them. Certainly in such cases there is not the ardour, and men cannot reap the reward belonging to the thinkers and brave servants of the truth. Practically whether Protestants or Romanists they are spiritually inert. Still it is well for them, well for the world, that a strong hand should urge them forward, since otherwise they would not move at all. Of many in all churches it must be said they are not victors in a fight of faith, they do not work out their own salvation. Yet they are guided, warned, persuaded into a certain habit of piety and understanding of truth, and their children have a new platform somewhat higher than their fathers' on which to begin life.

At Ophrah of the Abiezrites, though we cannot say much for the nature of the faith in God which has replaced idolatry, still the way is prepared for further and decisive action. Men do not cease from worship-

ping Baal and become true servants of the Most Holy in a single day; that requires time. There are better possibilities, but Gideon cannot teach the way of Jehovah, nor is he in the mood for religious inquiry. The conversion of Abiezer is quite of the same sort as in early Christian times was effected when a king went over to the new faith and ordered his subjects to be baptized. Not even Gideon knows the value of the faith to which the people have returned, in the strength of which they are to fight. They will be bold now, for even a little trust in God goes a long way in sustaining courage. They will face the enemy now to whom they have long submitted. But of the purity and righteousness into which the faith of Jehovah should lead them they have no vision.

Now with this in view many will think it strange to hear of the conversion of Abiezer. It is a great error however to despise the day of small things. God gives it and we ought to understand its use. Conversion cannot possibly mean the same in every period of the world's history; it cannot even mean the same in any two cases. To recognise this would be to clear the ground of much that hinders the teaching and the success of the gospel. Where there has been long familiarity with the New Testament, the facts of Christianity and the high spiritual ideas it presents, conversion properly speaking does not take place till the message of Christ to the soul stirs it to its depths, moves alike the reason and the will and creates fervent discipleship. But the history of Israel and of humanity moves forward continuously in successive discoveries or revelations of the highest culminating in the Christian salvation. To view Gideon as a religious reformer of the same kind as Isaiah is quite a mistake.

He had scarcely an idea in common with the great prophet of a later day. But the liberty he desired for his people and the association of liberty with the worship of Jehovah made his revolution a step in the march of Israel's redemption. Those who joined him with any clear purpose and sympathy were therefore converted men in a true if very limited sense. There must be first the blade and then the ear before there can be the full corn. We reckon Gideon a hero of faith, and his hope was truly in the same God Whom we worship—the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet his faith could not be on a level with ours, his knowledge being far less. The angel who speaks to him, the altar he builds, the Spirit of the Lord that comes upon him, his daring iconoclasm, the new purpose and power of the man are in a range quite above material life—and that is enough.

There are some circles in which honesty and truth-speaking are evidence of a work of grace. To become honest and to speak truth in the fear of God is to be converted, in a sense, where things are at that pass. There are people who are so cold that among them enthusiasm for anything good may be called super-human. Nobody has it. If it appears it must come from above. But these steps of progress, though we may describe them as supernatural, are elementary. Men have to be converted again and again, ever making one gain a step to another. The great advance comes when the soul believes enthusiastically in Christ, pledging itself to Him in full sight of the cross. This and nothing less is the conversion we need. To love freedom, righteousness, charity only prepares for the supreme love of God in Christ, in which life springs to its highest power and joy.

Now are we to suppose that Gideon alone of all the men of Israel had the needful spirit and faith to lead the revolution? Was there no one but the son of Joash? We do not find him fully equipped, nor as the years go by does he prove altogether worthy to be chief of the tribes of God. Were there not in many Hebrew towns souls perhaps more ardent, more spiritual than his, needing only the prophetic call, the touch of the Unseen Hand to make them aware of power and opportunity? The leadership of such a one as Moses is complete and unquestionable. He is the man of the age; knowledge, circumstances, genius fit him for the place he has to occupy. We cannot imagine a second Moses in the same period. But in Israel as well as among other peoples it is often a very imperfect hero who is found and followed. The work is done, but not so well done as we might think possible. Revolutions which begin full of promise lose their spirit because the leader reveals his weakness or even folly. We feel sure that there are many who have the power to lead in thought where the world has not dreamt of climbing, to make a clear road where as yet there is no path; and yet to them comes no messenger, the daily task goes on and it is not supposed that a leader, a prophet is passed by. Are there no better men that Ehud, Gideon, Jephthah must stand in the front?

One answer certainly is that the nation at the stage it has reached cannot as a whole esteem a better man, cannot understand finer ideas. A hundred men of more spiritual faith were possibly brooding over Israel's state, ready to act as fearlessly as Gideon and to a higher issue. But it could only have been after a cleansing of the nation's life, a suppression of Baal-

worship much more rigorous than could at that time be effected. And in every national crisis the thought of which the people generally are capable determines who must lead and what kind of work shall be done. The reformer before his time either remains unknown or ends in eclipse; either he gains no power or it passes rapidly from him because it has no support in popular intelligence or faith.

It may seem well-nigh impossible in our day for any man to fail of the work he can do; if he has the will we think he can make the way. The inward call is the necessity, and when that is heard and the man shapes a task for himself the day to begin will come. Is that certain? Perhaps there are many now who find circumstance a web from which they cannot break away without arrogance and unfaithfulness. They could speak, they could do if God called them; but does He call them? On every side ring the fluent praises of the idols men love to worship. One must indeed be deft in speech and many other arts who would hope to turn the crowd from its folly, for it will only listen to what seizes the ear, and the obscure thinker has not the secret of pleasing. While those who see no visions lead their thousands to a trivial victory, many an uncalled Gideon toils on in the threshing-floor. The duties of a low and narrow lot may hold a man; the babble all around of popular voices may be so loud that nothing can make way against them. A certain slowness of the humble and patient spirit may keep one silent who with little encouragement could speak words of quickening truth. But the day of utterance never comes.

To these waiting in the market-place it is comparatively a small thing that the world will not hire them.

But does the church not want them? Where God is named and professedly honoured, can it be that the smooth message is preferred because it is smooth? Can it be that in the church men shrink from instead of seeking the highest, most real and vital word that can be said to them? This is what oppresses, for it seems to imply that God has no use in His vineyard for a man when He lets him wait long unregarded, it seems to mean that there is no end for the wistful hope and the words that burn unspoken in the breast. The unrecognized thinker has indeed to trust God largely. He has often to be content with the assurance that what he would say but cannot as yet shall be said in good time, that what he would do but may not shall be done by a stronger hand. And further, he may cherish a faith for himself. No life can remain for ever unfruitful, or fruitful only in its lower capacities. Purposes broken off here shall find fulfilment. Where the highways of being reach beyond the visible horizon leaders will be needed for the yet advancing host, and the time of every soul shall come to do the utmost that is in it. The day of perfect service for many of God's chosen ones will begin where beyond these shadows there is light and space. Were it not so, some of the best lives would disappear in the darkest cloud.

XII.

"THE PEOPLE ARE YET TOO MANY."

JUDGES vi. 33-vii. 7.

ANOTHER day of hope and energy has dawned. One hillside at least rises sunlit out of darkness with the altar of Jehovah on its summit and holier sacrifices smoking there than Israel has offered for many a year. Let us see what elements of promise, what elements of danger or possible error mingle with the situation. There is a man to take the lead, a young man, thoughtful, bold, energetic, aware of a Divine call and therefore of some endowment for the task to be done. Gideon believes Jehovah to be Israel's God and Friend, Israel to be Jehovah's people. He has faith in the power of the Unseen Helper. Baal is nothing, a mere name—Bosheth, vanity. Jehovah is a certainty; and what He wills shall come about. So far strength, confidence. But of himself and the people Gideon is not sure. His own ability to gather and command an army, the fitness of any army the tribes can supply to contend with Midian, these are as yet unproved. Only one fact stands clear, Jehovah the supreme God with Whom are all powers and influences. The rest is in shadow. For one thing, Gideon cannot trace the connection between the Most High and himself, between the Power that controls the world and the power that

dwells in his own will or the hearts of other men. Yet with the first message a sign has been given, and other tokens may be sought as events move on. With that measure of uncertainty which keeps a man humble and makes him ponder his steps Gideon finds himself acknowledged leader in Manasseh and a centre of growing enthusiasm throughout the northern tribes.

For the people generally this at least may be said, that they have wisdom enough to recognize the man of aptitude and courage though he belongs to one of the humblest families and is the least in his father's household. Drowning men indeed must take the help that is offered, and Israel is at present almost in the condition of a drowning man. A little more and it will sink under the wave of the Midianite invasion. It is not a time to ask of the rank of a man who has character for the emergency. And yet, so often is the hero unacknowledged, especially when he begins, as Gideon did, with a religious stroke, that some credit must be given to the people for their ready faith. As the flame goes up from the altar at Ophrah men feel a flash of hope and promise. They turn to the Abiezrite in trust and through him begin to trust God again. Yes: there is a reformation of a sort, and an honest man is at the head of it. So far the signs of the time are good.

Then the old enthusiasm is not dead. Almost Israel had submitted, but again its spirit is rising. The traditions of Deborah and Barak, of Joshua, of Moses, of the desert march and victories linger with those who are hiding amongst the caves and rocks. Songs of liberty, promises of power are still theirs; they feel that they should be free. Canaan is Jehovah's gift to them and they will claim it. So far as reviving human energy and confidence avail, there is a germ out of

which the proper life of the people of God may spring afresh. And it is this that Gideon as a reformer must nourish, for the leader depends at every stage on the desires that have been kindled in the hearts of men. While he goes before them in thought and plan he can only go prosperously where they intelligently, heartily will follow. Opportunism is the base lagging behind with popular coldness, as moderatism in religion is. The reformer does not wait a moment when he sees an aspiration he can guide, a spark of faith that can be fanned into flame. But neither in church nor state can one man make a conquering movement. And so we see the vast extent of duty and responsibility. That there may be no opportunism every citizen must be alive to the morality of politics. That there may be no moderatism every Christian must be alive to the real duty of the church.

Now have the heads of families and the chief men in Israel been active in rallying the tribes? Or have the people waited on their chiefs and the chiefs coldly held back?

There are good elements in the situation but others not so encouraging. The secular leaders have failed; and what are the priests and Levites doing? We hear nothing of them. Gideon has to assume the double office of priest and ruler. At Shiloh there is an altar. There too is the ark, and surely some holy observances are kept. Why does Gideon not lead the people to Shiloh and there renew the national covenant through the ministers of the tabernacle? He knows little of the moral law and the sanctities of worship; and he is not at this stage inclined to assume a function that is not properly his. Yet it is unmistakable that Ophrah has to be the religious centre. Ah! clearly there is oppor-

tunism among secular leaders and moderatism among the priests. And this suggests that Judah in the south, although the tabernacle is not in her territory, may have an ecclesiastical reason for holding aloof now, as in Deborah's time she kept apart. Simeon and Levi are brethren. Judah, the vanguard in the desert march, the leading tribe in the first assault on Canaan, has taken Simeon into close alliance. Has Levi also been almost absorbed? There are signs that it may have been so. The later supremacy of Judah in religion requires early and deep root; and we have also to explain the separation between north and south already evident, which was but half overcome by David's kingship and reappeared before the end of Solomon's reign. It is very significant to read in the closing chapters of Judges of two Levites both of whom were connected with Judah. The Levites were certainly respected through the whole land, but their absence from all the incidents of the period of Deborah, Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah compels the supposition that they had most affinity with Judah and Simeon in the south. We know how people can be divided by ecclesiasticism; and there is at least some reason to suspect that while the northern tribes were suffering and fighting Judah went her own way enjoying peace and organizing worship.

Such then is the state of matters so far as the tribes are concerned at the time when Gideon sounds the trumpet in Abiezer and sends messengers throughout Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali. The tribes are partly prepared for conflict, but they are weak and still disunited. The muster of fighting men who gather at the call of Gideon is considerable and perhaps astonishes him. But the Midianites are in enormous

numbers in the plain of Jezreel between Moreh and Gilboa, having drawn together from their marauding expeditions at the first hint of a rising among the Hebrews. And now as the chief reviews his troops his early apprehension returns. It is with something like dismay that he passes from band to band. Ill-disciplined, ill-assorted these men do not bear the air of coming triumph. Gideon has too keen sight to be misled by tokens of personal popularity; nor can he estimate success by numbers. Looking closely into the faces of the men he sees marks enough of hesitancy, tokens even of fear. Many seem as if they had gathered like sheep to the slaughter, not as lions ready to dash on the prey. Assurance of victory he cannot find in his army; he must seek it elsewhere.

It is well that multitudes gather to the church to-day for worship and enter themselves as members. But to reckon all such as an army contending with infidelity and wickedness—that would indeed be a mistake. The mere tale of numbers gives no estimation of strength, fighting strength, strength to resist and to suffer. It is needful clearly to distinguish between those who may be called captives of the church or vassals simply, rendering a certain respect, and those others, often a very few and perhaps the least regarded, who really fight the battles. Our reckoning at present is often misleading so that we occupy ground which we cannot defend. We attempt to assail infidelity with an ill-disciplined host, many of whom have no clear faith, and to overcome worldliness by the co-operation of those who are more than half-absorbed in the pastimes and follies of the world. There is need to look back to Gideon who knew what it was to fight. While we are thankful to have so many connected with

the church for their own good we must not suppose that they represent aggressive strength; on the contrary we must clearly understand that they will require no small part of the available time and energy of the earnest. In short we have to count them not as helpers of the church's forward movement but as those who must be helped.

Gideon for his work will have to make sharp division. Three hundred who can dash fearlessly on the enemy will be more to his purpose than two-and-thirty thousand most of whom grow pale at the thought of battle, and he will separate by-and-by. But first he seeks another sign of Jehovah. This man knows that to do anything worthy for his fellow-men he must be in living touch with God. The idea has no more than elementary form; but it rules. He, Gideon, is only an instrument, and he must be well convinced that God is working through him. How can he be sure? Like other Israelites he is strongly persuaded that God appears and speaks to men through nature; and he craves a sign in the natural world which is of God's making and upholding. Now to us the sign Gideon asked may appear rude, uncouth and without any moral significance. A fleece which is to be wet one morning while the threshing-floor is dry, and dry next morning while the threshing-floor is wet supplies the means of testing the Divine presence and approval. Further it may be alleged that the phenomena admit of natural explanation. But this is the meaning. Gideon providing the fleece identifies himself with it. It is his fleece, and if God's dew drenches it that will imply that God's power shall enter Gideon's soul and abide in it even though Israel be dry as the dusty floor. The thought is at once simple and profound, child-like and Hebrew-

like, and carefully we must observe that it is a nature sign, not a mere portent, Gideon looks for. It is not whether God can do a certain seemingly impossible thing. That would not help Gideon. But the dew represents to his mind the vigour he needs, the vigour Israel needs if he should fail; and in reversing the sign, "Let the dew be on the ground and the fleece be dry," he seems to provide a hope even in prospect of his own failure or death. Gideon's appeal is for a revelation of the Divine in the same sphere as the lightning storm and rain in which Deborah found a triumphant proof of Jehovah's presence; yet there is a notable contrast. We are reminded of the "still small voice" Elijah heard as he stood in the cave-mouth after the rending wind and the earthquake and the lightning. We remember also the image of Hosea, "I will be as the dew unto Israel." There is a question in the Book of Job, "Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew?" The faith of Gideon makes answer, "Thou, O Most High, dost give the dews of heaven." The silent distillation of the dew is profoundly symbolic of the spiritual economy and those energies that are "not of this noisy world but silent and Divine." There is much of interest and meaning that lies thus beneath the surface in the story of the fleece.

Assured that yet another step in advance may be taken, Gideon leads his forces northward and goes into camp beside the spring of Harod on the slope of Gilboa. Then he does what seems a strange thing for a general on the eve of battle. The army is large but utterly insufficient in discipline and *morale* for a pitched battle with the Midianites. Men who have hastily snatched their fathers' swords and pikes of which they are half afraid are not to be relied upon in the heat

of a terrible struggle. Proclamation is therefore made that those who are fearful and trembling shall return to their homes. From the entrenchment of Israel on the hillside, where the name Jalîd or Gilead still survives, the great camp of the desert people could be seen, the black tents darkening all the valley toward the slope of Moreh a few miles away. The sight was enough to appal even the bold. Men thought of their families and homesteads. Those who had anything to lose began to re-consider and by morning only one-third of the Hebrew army was left with the leader. So perhaps it would be with thousands of Christians if the church were again called to share the reproach of Christ and resist unto blood. Under the banner of a popular Christianity many march to stirring music who if they supposed struggle to be imminent would be tempted to leave the ranks. Yet the fight is actually going on. Camp is set against camp, army is mingled with army; at the front there is hot work and many are falling. But in the rear it would seem to be a holiday; men are idling, gossiping, chaffering as though they had come out for amusement or trade, not at all like those who have pledged life in a great cause and have everything to win or lose. And again, in the thick of the strife, where courage and energy are strained to the utmost, we look round and ask whether the fearful have indeed withdrawn, for the suspicion is forced upon us that many who call themselves Christ's are on the other side. Did not some of those who are striking at us lift their hands yesterday in allegiance to the great Captain? Do we not see some who have marched with us holding the very position we are to take, bearing the very standards we must capture? Strangely confused is the field of battle, and hard is it to distin-

guish friends from foes. If the fearful would retire we should know better how we stand. If the enemy were all of Midian the issue would be clear. But fearful and faint-hearted Israelites who may be found any time actually contending against the faith are foes of a kind unknown in simpler days. So frequently does something of this sort happen that every Christian has need to ask himself whether he is clear of the offence. Has he ever helped to make the false world strong against the true, the proud world strong against the meek? Many of those who are doubtful and go home may sooner be pardoned than he who strikes only where a certain false *éclat* is to be won.

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote . . . .
We shall march prospering—not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us—not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done—while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire."

In the same line of thought lies another reflection. The men who had hastily snatched their fathers' swords and pikes of which they were half afraid represent to us certain modern defenders of Christianity—those who carry edged weapons of inherited doctrine with which they dare not strike home. The great battle-axes of reprobation, of eternal judgment, of Divine severity against sin once wielded by strong hands, how they tremble and swerve in the grasp of many a modern dialectician. The sword of the old creed, that once like Excalibur cleft helmets and breastplates through, how often it maims the hands that try to use it but want alike the strength and the cunning. Too often we see

a wavering blow struck that draws not a drop of blood nor even dints a shield, and the next thing is that the knight has run to cover behind some old bulwark long riddled and dilapidated. In the hands of these unskilled fighters too well armed for their strength the battle is worse than lost. They become a laughing-stock to the enemy, an irritation to their own side. It is time there was a sifting among the defenders of the faith and twenty and two thousand went back from Gilead. Is the truth of God become mere tin or lead that no new sword can be fashioned from it, no blade of Damascus firm and keen? Are there no gospel armourers fit for the task? Where the doctrinal contest is maintained by men who are not to the depth of their souls sure of the creeds they found on, by men who have no vision of the severity of God and the meaning of redemption, it ends only in confusion to themselves and those who are with them.

Ten thousand Israelites remain who according to their own judgment are brave enough and prepared for the fight; but the purpose of the commander is not answered yet. He is resolved to have yet another winnowing that shall leave only the men of temper like his own, men of quick intelligence no less than zeal. At the foot of the hill there flows a stream of water, and towards it Gideon leads his diminished army as if at once to cross and attack the enemy in camp. Will they seize his plan and like one man act upon it? Only on those who do can he depend. It is an effective trial. With the hot work of fighting before them the water is needful to all, but in the way of drinking men show their spirit. The most kneel or lie down by the edge of the brook that by putting their lips to the water they may take a long and leisurely draught. A

few supply themselves in quite another way. As a dog whose master is passing on with rapid strides, coming to a pool or stream by the way stops a moment to lap a few mouthfuls of water and then is off again to his master's side, so do these—three hundred of the ten thousand—bending swiftly down carry water to their mouths in the hollow of the hand. Full of the day's business they move on again before the nine thousand seven hundred have well begun to drink. They separate themselves and are by Gideon's side, beyond the stream, a chosen band proved fit for the work that is to be done. It is no haphazard division that is made by the test of the stream. There is wisdom in it, inspiration. "And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you and deliver the Midianites into thine hand."

Many are the commonplace incidents, the seemingly small points in life that test the quality of men. Every day we are led to the stream-side to show what we are, whether eager in the Divine enterprise of faith or slack and self-considering. Take any company of men and women who claim to be on the side of Christ, engaged and bound in all seriousness to His service. But how many have it clearly before them that they must not entangle themselves more than is absolutely needful with bodily and sensuous cravings, that they must not lie down to drink from the stream of pleasure and amusement? We show our spiritual state by the way in which we spend our leisure, our Saturday afternoons, our Sabbaths. We show whether we are fit for God's business by our use of the flowing stream of literature, which to some is an opiate, to others a pure and strengthening draught. The question simply is whether we are so engaged with God's plan for our

life, in comprehending it, fulfilling it, that we have no time to dawdle and no disposition for the merely casual and trifling. Are we in the responsible use of our powers occupied as that Athenian was in the service of his country of whom it is recorded: "There was in the whole city but one street in which Pericles was ever seen, the street which led to the market-place and the council-house. During the whole period of his administration he never dined at the table of a friend"? Let no one say there is not time in a world like this for social intercourse, for literary and scientific pursuits or the practice of the arts. The plan of God for men means life in all possible fulness and entrance into every field in which power can be gained. His will for us is that we should give to the world as Christ gave in free and uplifting ministry, and as a man can only give what he has first made his own the Christian is called to self-culture as full as the other duties of life will permit. He cannot explore too much, he cannot be too well versed in the thoughts and doings of men and the revelations of nature, for all he learns is to find high use. But the aim of personal enlargement and efficiency must never be forgotten, that aim which alone makes the self of value and gives it real life—the service and glory of God. Only in view of this aim is culture worth anything. And when in the providence of God there comes a call which requires us to pass with resolute step beyond every stream at which the mind and taste are stimulated that we may throw ourselves into the hard fight against evil there is to be no hesitation. Everything must yield now. The comparatively small handful who press on with concentrated purpose, making God's call and His work first and all else even their own

needs a secondary affair—to these will be the honour and the joy of victory.

We live in a time when people are piling up object after object that needs attention and entering into engagement after engagement that comes between them and the supreme duty of existence. They form so many acquaintances that every spare hour goes in visiting and receiving visits: yet the end of life is not talk. They are members of so many societies that they scarcely get at the work for which the societies exist: yet the end of life is not organizing. They see so many books, hear so much news and criticism that truth escapes them altogether: yet the end of life is to know and do the Truth. Civilization defeats its own use when it keeps us drinking so long at this and the other spring that we forget the battle. We mean to fight, we mean to do our part, but night falls while we are still occupied on the way. Yet our Master is one who restricted the earthly life to its simplest elements because only so could spiritual energy move freely to its mark.

In the incidents we have been reviewing voluntary churches may find hints at least towards the justification of their principle. The idea of a national church is on more than one side intelligible and valid. Christianity stands related to the whole body of the people, bountiful even to those who scorn its laws, pleading on their behalf with God, keeping an open door and sending forth a perpetual call of love to the weak, the erring, the depraved. The ideal of a national church is to represent this universal office and realize this inclusiveness of the Christian religion; and the charm is great. On the other hand a voluntary church is the recognition of the fact that while Christ stands related to all men

it is those only who engage at expense to themselves in the labour of the gospel who can be called believers, and that these properly constitute the church. The Hebrew people under the theocracy may represent the one ideal; Gideon's sifting of his army points to the other; neither, it must be frankly confessed, has ever been realized. Large numbers may join with some intelligence in worship and avail themselves of the sacraments who have no sense of obligation as members of the kingdom and are scarcely touched by the teaching of Christianity as to sin and salvation. A separated community again, depending on an enthusiasm which too often fails, rarely if ever accomplishes its hope. It aims at exhibiting an active and daring faith, the militancy, the urgency of the gospel, and in this mission what is counted success may be a hindrance and a snare. Numbers grow, wealth is acquired, but the intensity of belief is less than it was and the sacrifices still required are not freely made. Nevertheless is it not plain that a society which would represent the imperative claim of Christ to the undivided faith and loyalty of His followers must found upon a personal sense of obligation and personal eagerness? Is it not plain that a society which would represent the purity, the unearthliness, the rigour, we may even say, of Christ's doctrine, His life of renunciation and His cross must show a separateness from the careless world and move distinctly in advance of popular religious sentiment? Israel was God's people, yet when a leader went forth to a work of deliverance he had to sift out the few keen and devoted spirits. In truth every reformation implies a winnowing, and he does little as a teacher or a guide who does not make division among men

XIII.

"*MIDIAN'S EVIL DAY.*"

JUDGES vii. 8-viii. 21.

THERE is now with Gideon a select band of three hundred ready for a night attack on the Midianites. The leader has been guided to a singular and striking plan of action. It is however as he well knows a daring thing to begin assault upon the immense camp of Midian with so small a band, even though reserves of nearly ten thousand wait to join in the struggle; and we can easily see that the temper and spirit of the enemy were important considerations on the eve of so hazardous a battle. If the Midianites, Amalekites and Children of the East formed a united army, if they were prepared to resist, if they had posted sentinels on every side and were bold in prospect of the fight, it was necessary for Gideon to be well aware of the facts. On the other hand if there were symptoms of division in the tents of the enemy, if there were no adequate preparations, and especially if the spirit of doubt or fear had begun to show itself, these would be indications that Jehovah was preparing victory for the Hebrews.

Gideon is led to inquire for himself into the condition of the Midianitish host. To learn that already his name kindles terror in the ranks of the enemy will

dispel his lingering anxiety. "Jehovah said unto him . . . Go thou with Purah thy servant down to the camp; and thou shalt hear what they say; and afterward shall thine hands be strengthened." The principle is that for those who are on God's side it is always best to know fully the nature of the opposition. The temper of the enemies of religion, those irregular troops of infidelity and unrighteousness with whom we have to contend, is an element of great importance in shaping the course of our Christian warfare. We hear of organised vice, of combinations great and resolute against which we have to do battle. Language is used which implies that the condition of the churches of Christ contrasts pitiably with the activity and agreement of those who follow the black banners of evil. A vague terror possesses many that in the conflict with vice they must face immense resources and a powerful confederacy. The far-stretching encampment of the Midianites is to all appearance organised for defence at every point, and while the servants of God are resolved to attack they are oppressed by the vastness of the enterprise. Impiety, sensuality, injustice may seem to be in close alliance with each other, on the best understanding, fortified by superhuman craft and malice, with their gods in their midst to help them. But let us go down to the host and listen, the state of things may be other than we have thought.

Under cover of the night which made Midian seem more awful the Hebrew chief and his servant left the outpost on the slope of Gilboa and crept from shadow to shadow across the space which separated them from the enemy, vaguely seeking what quickly came. Lying in breathless silence behind some bush or wall the Hebrews heard one relating a dream to his fellow. "I

dreamed," he said, "and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the camp of Midian and came unto a tent and smote it that it fell, and overturned it that it lay along." The thoughts of the day are reproduced in the visions of the night. Evidently this man has had his mind directed to the likelihood of attack, the possibility of defeat. It is well known that the Hebrews are gathering to try the issue of battle. They are indeed like a barley cake such as poor Arabs bake among ashes—a defeated famished people whose life has been almost drained away. But tidings have come of their return to Jehovah and traditions of His marvellous power are current among the desert tribes. A confused sense of all this has shaped the dream in which the tent of the chief appears prostrate and despoiled. Gideon and Purah listen intently, and what they hear further is even more unexpected and reassuring. The dream is interpreted: "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel; for into his hand God hath delivered Midian and all the host." He who reads the dream knows more than the other. He has the name of the Hebrew captain. He has heard of the Divine messenger who called Gideon to his task and assured him of victory. As for the apparent strength of the host of Midian, he has no confidence in it for he has felt the tremor that passes through the great camp. So, lying concealed, Gideon hears from his enemies themselves as from God the promise of victory, and full of worshipping joy hastens back to prepare for an immediate attack.

Now in every combination of godless men there is a like feeling of insecurity, a like presage of disaster. Those who are in revolt against justice, truth and the religion of God have nothing on which to rest, no

enduring bond of union. What do they conceive as the issue of their attempts and schemes? Have they anything in view that can give heart and courage; an end worth toil and hazard? It is impossible, for their efforts are all in the region of the false where the seeming realities are but shadows that perpetually change. Let it be allowed that to a certain extent common interests draw together men of no principle so that they can co-operate for a time. Yet each individual is secretly bent on his own pleasure or profit and there is nothing that can unite them constantly. One selfish and unjust person may be depended upon to conceive a lively antipathy to every other selfish and unjust person. Midian and Amalek have their differences with one another, and each has its own rival chiefs, rival families, full of the bitterest jealousy which at any moment may burst into flame. The whole combination is weak from the beginning, a mere horde of clashing desires incapable of harmony, incapable of a sustaining hope.

In the course of our Lord's brief ministry the insecurity of those who opposed Him was often shown. The chief priests and scribes and lawyers whispered to each other the fears and anxieties He aroused. In the Sanhedrin the discussion about Him comes to the point, "What do we? For this man doeth many signs. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans will come and take away both our peace and our nation." The Pharisees say among themselves, "Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? Behold the world is gone after Him." And what was the reason, what was the cause of this weakness? Intense devotion to the law and the institutions of religion animated those Israelites yet sufficed not to

bind them together. Rival schools and claims honeycombed the whole social and ecclesiastical fabric. The pride of religious ancestry and a keenly cherished ambition could not maintain peace or hope; they were of no use against the calm authority of the Nazarene. Judaism was full of the bitterness of falsehood. The seeds of despair were in the minds of those who accused Christ, and the terrible harvest was reaped within a generation.

Passing from this supreme evidence that the wrong can never be the strong, look at those ignorant and unhappy persons who combine against the laws of society. Their suspicions of each other are proverbial, and ever with them is the feeling that sooner or later they will be overtaken by the law. They dream of that and tell each other their dreams. The game of crime is played against well-known odds. Those who carry it on are aware that their haunts will be discovered, their gang broken up. A bribe will tempt one of their number and the rest will have to go their way to the cell or the gallows. Yet with the presage of defeat wrought into the very constitution of the mind and with innumerable proofs that it is no delusion, there are always those amongst us who attempt what even in this world is so hazardous and in the larger sweep of moral economy is impossible. In selfishness, in oppression and injustice, in every kind of sensuality men adventure as if they could ensure their safety and defy the day of reckoning.

Gideon is now well persuaded that the fear of disaster is not for Israel. He returns to the camp and forthwith prepares to strike. It seems to him now the easiest thing possible to throw into confusion that great encampment of Midian. One bold device rapidly

executed will set in operation the suspicions and fears of the different desert tribes and they will melt away in defeat. The stratagem has already shaped itself. The three hundred are provided with the earthenware jars or pitchers in which their simple food has been carried. They soon procure firebrands and from among the ten thousand in the camp enough rams' horns are collected to supply one to each of the attacking party. Then three bands are formed of equal strength and ordered to advance from different sides upon the enemy, holding themselves ready at a given signal to break the pitchers, flash the torches in the air and make as much noise as they can with their rude mountain horns. The scheme is simple, quaint, ingenious. It reveals skill in making use of the most ordinary materials which is of the very essence of generalship. The harsh cornets especially filling the valley with barbaric tumult are well adapted to create terror and confusion. We hear nothing of ordinary weapons, but it must not be supposed that the three hundred were unarmed.

It was not long after midnight, the middle watch had been newly set, when the three companies reached their stations. The orders had been well seized and all went precisely as Gideon had conceived. With crash and tumult and flare of torches there came the battle-shout—"Sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.' The Israelites had no need to press forward; they stood every man in his place, while fear and suspicion did the work. The host ran and cried and fled. To and fro among the tents, seeing now on this side now on that the menacing flames, turning from the battle-cry here to be met in an opposite quarter by the wild dissonance of the horns, the surprised army was thrown

into utter confusion. Every one thought of treachery and turned his sword against his fellow. Escape was the common impulse, and the flight of the disorganized host took a south-easterly direction by the road that led to the Jordan valley and across it to the Hauran and the desert. It was a complete rout and the Hebrews had only to follow up their advantage. Those who had not shared the attack joined in the pursuit. Every village that the flying Midianites passed sent out its men, brave enough now that the arm of the tyrant was broken. Down to the ghor of Jordan the terror-stricken Arabs fled and along the bank for many a mile, harassed in the difficult ground by the Hebrews who know every yard of it. At the fords there is dreadful work. Those who cross at the highest point near Succoth are not the main body, but the two chiefs Zebah and Zalmunna are among them and Gideon takes them in hand. Away to the south Ephraim has its opportunity and gains a victory where the road along the valley of Jordan diverges to Beth-barah. For days and nights the retreat goes on till the strange swift triumph of Israel is assured.

1. There is in this narrative a lesson as to equipment for the battle of life and the service of God somewhat like that which we found in the story of Shamgar, yet with points of difference. We are reminded here of what may be done without wealth, without the material apparatus that is often counted necessary. The modern habit is to make much of tools and outfit. The study and applications of science have brought in a fashion of demanding everything possible in the way of furniture, means, implements. Everywhere this fashion prevails, in the struggle of commerce and manufacture, in literature and art, in teaching and

household economy, worst of all in church life and work. Michael Angelo wrought the frescoes of the Sistine chapel with the ochres he dug with his own hands from the garden of the Vatican. Mr. Darwin's great experiments were conducted with the rudest and cheapest furniture, anything a country house could supply. But in the common view it is on perfect tools and material almost everything depends; and we seem in the way of being absolutely mastered by them. What, for example, is the ecclesiasticism which covers an increasing area of religious life? And what is the parish or congregation fully organized in the modern sense? Must we not call them elaborate machinery expected to produce spiritual life? There must be an extensive building with every convenience for making worship agreeable; there must be guilds and guild rooms, societies and committees, each with an array of officials; there must be due assignment of observances to fit days and seasons; there must be architecture, music and much else. The ardent soul desiring to serve God and man has to find a place in conjunction with all this and order his work so that it may appear well in a report. To some these things may appear ludicrous, but they are too significant of the drift from that simplicity and personal energy in which the Church of Christ began. We seem to have forgotten that the great strokes have been made by men who like Gideon delayed not for elaborate preparation nor went back on rule and precedent, but took the firebrands, pitchers and horns that could be got together on a hill-side. The great thing both in the secular and in the spiritual region is that men should go straight at the work which has to be done and do it with sagacity, intelligence and fervour of their own.

We look back to those few plain men with whom lay the new life of the world, going forth with the strong certain word of a belief for which they could die, a truth by which the dead could be revived. Their equipment was of the soul. Of outward means and material advantages they were, one may say, destitute. Our methods are very different. No doubt in these days there is a work of defence which requires the finest weapons and most careful preparation. Yet even here no weight of polished armour is so good for David's use as the familiar sling and stone. And in the general task of the church, teaching, guiding, setting forth the Gospel of Christ, whatever keeps soul from honest and hearty touch with soul is bad. We want above all things men who have sanctified common-sense, mother-wit, courage and frank simplicity, men who can find their own means and gain their own victories. The churches that do not breed such are doomed.

2. We have been reading a story of panic and defeat, and we may be advised to find in it a hint of the fate that is to overtake Christianity when modern criticism has finally ordered its companies and provided them with terrifying horns and torches. Or certain Christians may feel that the illustration fits the state of alarm in which they are obliged to live. Is not the church like that encampment in the valley, exposed to the most terrible and startling attacks on all sides, and in peril constantly of being routed by unforeseen audacities, here of Ingersoll, Bakunin, Bebel, there of Huxley or Renan? Not seldom still, though after many a false alarm, the cry is raised, "The church, the faith—in danger!"

Once for all—the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is

never in danger, though enemies buzz on every side like furious hornets. A confederation of men, a human organization may be in deadly peril and may know that the harsh tumult around it means annihilation. But no institution is identical with the Catholic Church, much less with the kingdom of God. Christians need not dread the honest criticism which has a right to speak, nor even the malice, envy, which have no right yet dare to utter themselves. Whether it be sheer atheism or scientific dogma or political change or criticism of the Bible that makes the religious world tremble and cry out for fear, in every case panic is unchristian and unworthy. For one thing, do we not frame numerous thoughts and opinions of our own and devise many forms of service which in the course of time we come to regard as having a sacredness equal to the doctrine and ordinances of Christ? And do we not frequently fall into the error of thinking that the symbols, traditions, outward forms of a Christian society are essential and as much to be contended for as the substance of the gospel? Criticism of these is dreaded as criticism of Christ, decay of them is regarded, often quite wrongly, as decay of the work of God on earth. We forget that forms, as such, are on perpetual trial, and we forget also that no revolution or seeming disaster can touch the facts on which Christianity rests. The Divine gospel is eternal. Indeed, assailants of the right sort are needed, and even those of the bad sort have their use. The encampment of the unseeing and unthinking, of the self-loving and arrogant needs to be startled; and he is no emissary of Satan who honestly leads an attack where men lie in false peace, though he may be for his own part but a rude fighter. The panic indeed sometimes takes a singular and pathetic

form. The unexpected enemy breaks in on the camp with blare of ignorant rebuke and noisy demonstration of strength and authority. Him the church hails as a new apostle, at his feet she takes her place with a strange unprofitable humility: and this is the worst kind of disaster. Better far a serious battle than such submission.

3. Without pursuing this suggestion we pass to another raised by the conduct of the men of Ephraim. They obeyed the call of Gideon when he hastily summoned them to take the lower fords of Jordan within their own territory and prevent the escape of the Midianites. To them it fell to gain a great victory, and especially to slay two subordinate chiefs, Oreb and Zeeb, the Crow and the Wolf. But afterwards they complained that they had not been called at first when the commander was gathering his army. We are informed that they chode with him sharply on this score, and it was only by his soft answer which implied a little flattery that they were appeased. "What have I now in comparison with you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer?"

The men of Ephraim were not called at first along with Manasseh, Zebulun, Asher and Naphtali. True. But why? Was not Gideon aware of their selfish indifference? Did he not read their character? Did he not perceive that they would have sullenly refused to be led by a man of Manasseh, the youngest son of Joash of Abiezer? Only too well did the young chief know with whom he had to deal. There had been fighting already between Israel and the Midianites. Did Ephraim help then? Nay: but secure in her mountains that tribe sullenly and selfishly held aloof.

And now the complaint is made when Gideon, once unknown, is a victorious hero, the deliverer of the Hebrew nation.

Do we not often see something like this? There are people who will not hazard position or profit in identifying themselves with an enterprise while the issue is doubtful, but desire to have the credit of connection with it if it should succeed. They have not the humanity to associate themselves with those who are fighting in a good cause because it is good. In fact they do not know what is good, their only test of value being success. They lie by, looking with half-concealed scorn on the attempts of the earnest, sneering at their heat either in secret or openly, and when one day it becomes clear that the world is applauding they conceive a sudden respect for those at whom they scoffed. Now they will do what they can to help,—with pleasure, with liberality. Why were they not sooner invited? They will almost make a quarrel of that, and they have to be soothed with fair speeches. And people who are worldly at heart push forward in this fashion when Christian affairs have success or *éclat* attached to them, especially where religion wears least of its proper air and has somewhat of the earthly in tone and look. Christ pursued by the Sanhedrin, despised by the Roman is no person for them to know. Let Him have the patronage of Constantine or a de' Medici and they are then assured that He has claims which they will admit—in theory. More than that needs not be expected from men and women "of the world." "*Messieurs, surtout, pas de zèle.*" Above all, no zeal: that is the motto of every Ephraim since time began. Wait till zeal is cooling before you join the righteous cause.

4. But while there are the carnal who like to share the success of religion after it has cooled down to their temperature, another class must not be forgotten, those who in their selfishness show the worst kind of hostility to the cause they should aid. Look at the men of Succoth and Penuel. Gideon and his band leading the pursuit of the Midianites have had no food all night and are faint with hunger. At Succoth they ask bread in vain. Instead of help they get the taunt —"Are Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand that we should give bread unto thine army?" Onward they press another stage up the hills to Penuel, and there also their request is refused. Gideon savage with the need of his men threatens dire punishment to those who are so callous and cruel; and when he returns victorious his threat is made good. With thorns and briars of the wilderness he scourges the elders of Succoth. The pride of Penuel is its watch-tower, and that he demolishes, at the same time decimating the men of the city.

Penuel and Succoth lay in the way between the wilderness in which the Midianites dwelt and the valleys of western Palestine. The men of these cities feared that if they aided Gideon they would bring on themselves the vengeance of the desert tribes. Yet where do we see the lowest point of unfaith and meanness, in Ephraim or Succoth? It is perhaps hard to say which are the least manly: those contrive to join the conquering host and snatch the credit of victory; these are not so clever, and while they are as eager to make things smooth for themselves the thorns and briars are more visibly their portion. To share the honour of a cause for which you have done very little is an easy thing in this world, though an honest

man cannot wear that kind of laurel; but as for Succoth and Penuel, the poor creatures, who will not pity them? It is so inconvenient often to have to decide. They would temporise if it were possible—supply the famished army with mouldy corn and raisins at a high price, and do as much next time for the Midianites. Yet the opportunity for this kind of salvation does not always come. There are times when people have to choose definitely whom they will serve, and discover to their horror that judgment follows swiftly upon base and cowardly choice. And God is faithful in making the recusants feel the urgency of moral choice and the grip He has of them. They would fain let the battle of truth sweep by and not meddle with it. But something is forced upon them. They cannot let the whole affair of salvation alone, but are driven to refuse heaven in the very act of trying to escape hell. And although judgment lingers, ever and anon demonstration is made among the ranks of the would-be prudent that One on high judges for His warriors. It is not the Gideon leading the little band of faint but eager champions of faith who punishes the callous heathenism and low scorn of a Succoth and Penuel. The Lord of Hosts Himself will vindicate and chasten. "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe in Me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea."

5. Yet another word of instruction is found in the appeal of Gideon: "Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me, for they be faint and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna." Well has the expression "Faint yet pursuing" found its place as a proverb of the religious life. We are called to

run with patience a race that needs long ardour and strenuous exertion. The goal is far away, the ground is difficult. As day after day and year after year demands are made upon our faith, our resolution, our thought, our devotion to One who remains unseen and on our confidence in the future life it is no wonder that many feel faint and weary. Often have we to pass through a region inhabited by those who are indifferent or hostile, careless or derisive. At many a door we knock and find no sympathy. We ask for bread and receive a stone; and still the fight slackens not, still have we to reach forth to the things that are before. But the faintness is not death. In the most terrible hours there is new life for our spiritual nature. Refreshment comes from an unseen hand when earth refuses help. We turn to Christ; we consider Him who endured great contradiction of sinners against Himself; we realize afresh that we are ensured of the fulness of His redemption. The body grows faint, but the soul presses on; the body dies and has to be left behind as a worn-out garment, but the spirit ascends into immortal youth.

> "On, chariot! on, soul!
> Ye are all the more fleet.
> Be alone at the goal
> Of the strange and the sweet!"

6. Finally let us glance at the fate of Zebah and Zalmunna, not without a feeling of admiration and of pity for the rude ending of these stately lives.

The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon has slain its thousands. The vast desert army has been scattered like chaff, in the flight, at the fords, by the rock Oreb and the winepress Zeeb, all along the way by Nobah and Jogbehah, and finally at Karkor, where having

encamped in fancied security the residue is smitten. Now the two defeated chiefs are in the hand of Gideon, their military renown completely wrecked, their career destroyed. To them the expedition into Canaan was part of the common business of leadership. As emirs of nomadic tribes they had to find pasture and prey for their people. No special antagonism to Jehovah, no ill-will against Israel more than other nations led them to cross the Jordan and scour the plains of Palestine. It was quite in the natural course of things that Midianites and Amalekites should migrate and move towards the west. And now the defeat is crushing. What remains therefore but to die?

We hear Gideon command his son Jether to fall upon the captive chiefs, who brilliant and stately once lie disarmed, bound and helpless. The indignity is not to our mind. We would have thought more of Gideon had he offered freedom to these captives "fallen on evil days," men to be admired not hated. But probably they do not desire a life which has in it no more of honour. Only let the Hebrew leader not insult them by the stroke of a young man's sword. The great chiefs would die by a warrior's blow. And Jether cannot slay them; his hand falters as he draws the sword. These men who have ruled their tens of thousands have still the lion look that quails. "Rise thou and fall upon us," they say to Gideon: "for as the man is, so is his strength." And so they die, types of the greatest earthly powers that resist the march of Divine Providence, overthrown by a sword which even in faulty weak human hands has indefeasible sureness and edge.

"As the man is, so is his strength." It is another of the pregnant sayings which meet us here and there

even in the least meditative parts of Scripture. Yes: as a man is in character, in faith, in harmony with the will of God, so is his strength; as he is in falseness, injustice, egotism and ignorance, so is his weakness. And there is but one real perennial kind of strength. The demonstration made by selfish and godless persons, though it shake continents and devastate nations, is not Force. It has no nerve, no continuance, but is mere fury which decays and perishes. Strength is the property of truth and truth only; it belongs to those who are in union with eternal reality and to no others in the universe. Would you be invincible? You must move with the eternal powers of righteousness and love. To be showy in appearance or terrible in sound on the wrong side with the futilities of the world is but incipient death.

On all sides the application may be seen. In the home and its varied incidents of education, sickness, discipline; in society high and low; in politics, in literature. As the man or woman is in simple allegiance to God and clear resolution there is strength to endure, to govern, to think and every way to live. Otherwise there can only be instability, foolishness, blundering selfishness, a sad passage to inanition and decay.

XIV.

GIDEON THE ECCLESIASTIC.

JUDGES viii. 22-28.

THE great victory of Gideon had this special significance, that it ended the incursions of the wandering races of the desert. Canaan offered a continual lure to the nomads of the Arabian wilderness, as indeed the eastern and southern parts of Syria do at the present time. The hazard was that wave after wave of Midianites and Bedawin sweeping over the land should destroy agriculture and make settled national life and civilization impossible. And when Gideon undertook his work the risk of this was acute. But the defeat inflicted on the wild tribes proved decisive. "Midian was subdued before the children of Israel, and they lifted up their heads no more." The slaughter that accompanied the overthrow of Zebah and Zalmunna, Oreb and Zeeb became in the literature of Israel a symbol of the destruction which must overtake the foes of God. "Do thou to thine enemies as unto Midian"—so runs the cry of a psalm—"Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb: yea, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, Let us take to ourselves in possession the habitations of God." In Isaiah the remembrance gives a touch of vivid colour to the oracle of the coming Wonderful, Prince of Peace. "The yoke of his burden

and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor shall be broken as in the day of Midian." Regarding the Assyrian also the same prophet testifies, "The Lord of Hosts shall stir up against him a scourge as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb." We have no song like that of Deborah celebrating the victory, but a sense of its immense importance held the mind of the people, and by reason of it Gideon found a place among the heroes of faith. Doubtless he had, to begin with, a special reason for taking up arms against the Midianitish chiefs that they had slain his two brothers: the duty of an avenger of blood fell to him. But this private vengeance merged in the desire to give his people freedom, religious as well as political, and it was Jehovah's victory that he won, as he himself gladly acknowledged. We may see, therefore, in the whole enterprise, a distinct step of religious development. Once again the name of the Most High was exalted; once again the folly of idol worship was contrasted with the wisdom of serving the God of Abraham and Moses. The tribes moved in the direction of national unity and also of common devotion to their unseen King. If Gideon had been a man of larger intellect and knowledge he might have led Israel far on the way towards fitness for the mission it had never yet endeavoured to fulfil. But his powers and inspiration were limited.

On his return from the campaign the wish of the people was expressed to Gideon that he should assume the title of king. The nation needed a settled government, a centre of authority which would bind the tribes together, and the Abiezrite chief was now clearly marked as a man fit for royalty. He was able to persuade as well as to fight; he was bold, firm and prudent. But

to the request that he should become king and found a dynasty Gideon gave an absolute refusal: "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; Jehovah shall rule over you." We always admire a man who refuses one of the great posts of human authority or distinction. The throne of Israel was even at that time a flattering offer. But should it have been made? There are few who will pause in a moment of high personal success to think of the point of morality involved; yet we may credit Gideon with the belief that it was not for him or any man to be called king in Israel. As a judge he had partly proved himself, as a judge he had a Divine call and a marvellous vindication: that name he would accept, not the other. One of the chief elements of Gideon's character was a strong but not very spiritual religiousness. He attributed his success entirely to God, and God alone he desired the nation to acknowledge as its Head. He would not even in appearance stand between the people and their Divine Sovereign, nor with his will should any son of his take a place so unlawful and dangerous.

Along with his devotion to God it is quite likely that the caution of Gideon had much to do with his resolve. He had already found some difficulty in dealing with the Ephraimites, and he could easily foresee that if he became king the pride of that large clan would rise strongly against him. If the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim was better than the whole vintage of Abiezer, as Gideon had declared, did it not follow that any elder of the great central tribe would better deserve the position of king than the youngest son of Joash of Abiezer? The men of Succoth and Penuel too had to be reckoned with. Before Gideon could establish himself in a royal seat he would have to fight a great coalition in the centre

and south and also beyond Jordan. To the pains of oppression would succeed the agony of civil war. Unwilling to kindle a fire which might burn for years and perhaps consume himself, he refused to look at the proposal, flattering and honourable as it was.

But there was another reason for his decision which may have had even more weight. Like many men who have distinguished themselves in one way, his real ambition lay in a different direction. We think of him as a military genius. He for his part looked to the priestly office and the transmission of Divine oracles as his proper calling. The enthusiasm with which he overthrew the altar of Baal, built the new altar of Jehovah and offered his first sacrifice upon it survived when the wild delights of victory had passed away. The thrill of awe and the strange excitement he had felt when Divine messages came to him and signs were given in answer to his prayer affected him far more deeply and permanently than the sight of a flying enemy and the pride of knowing himself victor in a great campaign. Neither did kingship appear much in comparison with access to God, converse with Him and declaration of His will to men. Gideon appears already tired of war, with no appetite certainly for more, however successful, and impatient to return to the mysterious rites and sacred privileges of the altar. He had good reason to acknowledge the power over Israel's destiny of the Great Being Whose spirit had come upon him, Whose promises had been fulfilled. He desired to cultivate that intercourse with Heaven which more than anything else gave him the sense of dignity and strength. From the offer of a crown he turned as if eager to don the robe of a priest and listen for the holy oracles that none beside himself seemed able to receive.

It is notable that in the history of the Jewish kings the tendency shown by Gideon frequently reappeared. According to the law of later times the kingly duties should have been entirely separated from those of the priesthood. It came to be a dangerous and sacrilegious thing for the chief magistrate of the tribes, their leader in war, to touch the sacred implements or offer a sacrifice. But just because the ideas of sacrifice and priestly service were so fully in the Jewish mind the kings, either when especially pious or especially strong, felt it hard to refrain from the forbidden privilege. On the eve of a great battle with the Philistines Saul, expecting Samuel to offer the preparatory sacrifice and inquire of Jehovah, waited seven days and then impatient of delay undertook the priestly part and offered a burnt sacrifice. His act was properly speaking a confession of the sovereignty of God; but when Samuel came he expressed great indignation against the king, denounced his interference with sacred things and in effect removed him then and there from the kingdom. David for his part appears to have been scrupulous in employing the priests for every religious function; but at the bringing up of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom he is reported to have led a sacred dance before the Lord and to have worn a linen ephod, that is a garment specially reserved for the priests. He also took to himself the privilege of blessing the people in the name of the Lord. On the division of the kingdom Jeroboam promptly assumed the ordering of religion, set up shrines and appointed priests to minister at them; and in one scene we find him standing by an altar to offer incense. The great sin of Uzziah, on account of which he had to go forth from the temple a hopeless leper, is stated in the second

book of Chronicles to have been an attempt to burn incense on the altar. These are cases in point; but the most remarkable is that of Solomon. To be king, to build and equip the temple and set in operation the whole ritual of the house of God did not content that magnificent prince. His ambition led him to assume a part far loftier and more impressive than fell to the chief priest himself. It was Solomon who offered the prayer when the temple was consecrated, who pronounced the blessing of God on the worshipping multitude; and at his invocation it was that "fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices." This crowning act of his life, in which the great monarch rose to the very highest pitch of his ambition, actually claiming and taking precedence over all the house of Aaron, will serve to explain the strange turn of the Abiezrite's history at which we have now arrived.

"He made an ephod and put it in his city, even in Ophrah." A strong but not spiritual religiousness, we have said, is the chief note of Gideon's character. It may be objected that such a one, if he seeks ecclesiastical office, does so unworthily; but to say so is an uncharitable error. It is not the devout temper alone that finds attraction in the ministry of sacred things; nor should a love of place and power be named as the only other leading motive. One who is not devout may in all sincerity covet the honour of standing for God before the congregation, leading the people in worship and interpreting the sacred oracles. A vulgar explanation of human desire is often a false one; it is so here. The ecclesiastic may show few tokens of the spiritual temper, the other-worldliness, the glowing and simple truth we rightly account to be the proper

marks of a Christian ministry; yet he may by his own reckoning have obeyed a clear call. His function in this case is to maintain order and administer outward rites with dignity and care—a limited range of duty indeed, but not without utility, especially when there are inferior and less conscientious men in office not far away. He does not advance faith, but according to his power he maintains it.

But the ecclesiastic must have the ephod. The man who feels the dignity of religion more than its humane simplicity, realizing it as a great movement of absorbing interest, will naturally have regard to the means of increasing dignity and making the movement impressive. Gideon calls upon the people for the golden spoils taken from the Midianites, nose-rings, earrings and the like, and they willingly respond. It is easy to obtain gifts for the outward glory of religion, and a golden image is soon to be seen within a house of Jehovah on the hill at Ophrah. Whatever form it had, this figure was to Gideon no idol but a symbol or sign of Jehovah's presence among the people, and by means of it, in one or other of the ways used at the time, as for example by casting lots from within it, appeal was made to God with the utmost respect and confidence. When it is supposed that Gideon fell away from his first faith in making this image the error lies in overestimating his spirituality at the earlier stage. We must not think that at any time the use of a symbolic image would have seemed wrong to him. It was not against images but against worship of false and impure gods that his zeal was at first directed. The sacred pole was an object of detestation because it was a symbol of Astarte.

In some way we cannot explain the whole life of

Gideon appears as quite separate from the religious ordinances maintained before the ark, and at the same time quite apart from that Divine rule which forbade the making and worship of graven images. Either he did not know the second commandment, or he understood it only as forbidding the use of an image of any creature and the worship of a creature by means of an image. We know that the cherubim in the Holy of Holies were symbolic of the perfections of creation, and through them the greatness of the Unseen God was realized. So it was with Gideon's ephod or image, which was however used in seeking oracles. He acted at Ophrah as priest of the true God. The sacrifices he offered were to Jehovah. People came from all the northern tribes to bow at his altar and receive divine intimations through him. The southern tribes had Gilgal and Shiloh. Here at Ophrah was a service of the God of Israel, not perhaps intended to compete with the other shrines, yet virtually depriving them of their fame. For the expression is used that all Israel went a whoring after the ephod.

But while we try to understand we are not to miss the warning which comes home to us through this chapter of religious history. Pure and, for the time, even elevated in the motive, Gideon's attempt at priestcraft led to his fall. For a while we see the hero acting as judge at Ophrah and presiding with dignity at the altar. His best wisdom is at the service of the people and he is ready to offer for them at new moon or harvest the animals they desire to consecrate and consume in the sacred feast. In a spirit of real faith and no doubt with much sagacity he submits their inquiries to the test of the ephod. But "the thing became a snare to Gideon and his house," perhaps in

the way of bringing in riches and creating the desire for more. Those who applied to him as a revealer brought gifts with them. Gradually as wealth increased among the people the value of the donations would increase, and he who began as a disinterested patriot may have degenerated into a somewhat avaricious man who made a trade of religion. On this point we have, however, no information. It is mere surmise depending upon observation of the way things are apt to go amongst ourselves.

Reviewing the story of Gideon's life we find this clear lesson, that within certain limits he who trusts and obeys God has a quite irresistible efficiency. This man had, as we have seen, his limitations, very considerable. As a religious leader, prophet or priest, he was far from competent; there is no indication that he was able to teach Israel a single Divine doctrine, and as to the purity and mercy, the righteousness and love of God, his knowledge was rudimentary. In the remote villages of the Abiezrites the tradition of Jehovah's name and power remained, but in the confusion of the times there was no education of children in the will of God: the Law was practically unknown. From Shechem where Baal-Berith was worshipped the influence of a degrading idolatry had spread, obliterating every religious idea except the barest elements of the old faith. Doing his very best to understand God, Gideon never saw what religion in our sense means. His sacrifices were appeals to a Power dimly felt through nature and in the greater epochs of the national history, chastising now and now friendly and beneficent.

Yet, seriously limited as he was, Gideon when he had once laid hold of the fact that he was called by the unseen God to deliver Israel went on step by step to

the great victory which made the tribes free. His responsibility to his fellow-Israelites became clear along with his sense of the demand made upon him by God. He felt himself like the wind, like the lightning, like the dew, an agent or instrument of the Most High, bound to do His part in the course of things. His will was enlisted in the Divine purpose. This work, this deliverance of Israel was to be effected by him and no other. He had the elemental powers with him, in him. The immense armies of Midian could not stand in his way. He was, as it were, a storm that must hurl them back into the wilderness defeated and broken.

Now this is the very conception of life which we in our far wider knowledge are apt to miss, which nevertheless it is our chief business to grasp and carry into practice. You stand there, a man instructed in a thousand things of which Gideon was ignorant, instructed especially in the nature and will of God Whom Christ has revealed. It is your privilege to take a broad survey of human life, of duty, to look beyond the present to the eternal future with its infinite possibilities of gain and loss. But the danger is that year after year all thought and effort shall be on your own account, that with each changing wind of circumstance you change your purpose, that you never understand God's demand nor find the true use of knowledge, will and life in fulfilling that. Have you a Divine task to effect? You doubt it. Where is anything that can be called a commission of God? You look this way and that for a little, then give up the quest. This year finds you without enthusiasm, without devotion even as you have been in other years. So life ebbs away and is lost in the wide flat sands of the secular and trivial, and the soul never becomes part of the strong

ocean current of Divine purpose. We pity or deride some who, with little knowledge and in many errors alike of heart and head, were yet men as many of us may not claim to be, alive to the fact of God and their own share in Him. But they were so limited, those Hebrews, you say, a mere horde of shepherds and husbandmen; their story is too poor, too chaotic to have any lesson for us. And in sheer incapacity to read the meaning of the tale you turn from this Book of Judges, as from a barbarian myth, less interesting than Homer, of no more application to yourself than the legends of the Round Table. Yet, all the while, the one supreme lesson for a man to read and take home to himself is written throughout the book in bold and living characters—that only when life is realized as a vocation is it worth living. God may be faintly known, His will but rudely interpreted; yet the mere understanding that He gives life and rewards effort is an inspiration. And when His life-giving call ceases to stir and guide, there can be for the man, the nation, only irresolution and weakness.

A century ago Englishmen were as little devout as they are to-day; they were even less spiritual, less moved to fine issues. They had their scepticisms too, their rough ignorant prejudices, their giant errors and perversities. "We have gained vastly," as Professor Seeley says, "in breadth of view, intelligence and refinement. Probably what we threw aside could not be retained; what we adopted was forced upon us by the age. Nevertheless, we had formerly what I may call a national discipline, which formed a firm, strongly-marked national character. We have now only materials, which may be of the first quality, but have not been worked up. We have everything except

lecided views and steadfast purpose—everything in short except character." Yes: the sense of the nation's calling has decayed, and with it the nation's strength. In leaders and followers alike purpose fades as faith evaporates, and we are faithless because we attempt nothing noble under the eye and sceptre of the King.

You live, let us say, among those who doubt God, doubt whether there is any redemption, whether the whole Christian gospel and hope are not in the air, dreams, possibilities, rather than facts of the Eternal Will. The storm-wind blows and you hear its roaring: that is palpable fact, divine or cosmic. Its errand will be accomplished. Great rivers flow, great currents sweep through the ocean. Their mighty urgency who can doubt? But the spiritual who can believe? You do not feel in the sphere of the moral, of the spiritual the wind that makes no sound, the current that rolls silently charged with sublime energies, effecting a vast and wonderful purpose. Yet here are the great facts; and we must find our part in that spiritual urgency, do our duty there, or lose all. We must launch out on the mighty stream of redemption or never reach eternal light, for all else moves down to death. Christ Himself is to be victorious in us. The glory of our life is that we can be irresistible in the region of our duty, irresistible in conflict with the evil, the selfishness, the falsehood given us to overthrow. To realize that is to live. The rest is all mere experiment, getting ready for the task of existence, making armour, preparing food, otherwise, at the worst, a winter's morning before inglorious death.

One other thing observe, that underlying Gideon's desire to fill the office of priest there was a dull perception of the highest function of one man in relation to others. It appears to the common mind a great thing

to rule, to direct secular affairs, to have the command of armies and the power of filling offices and conferring dignities; and no doubt to one who desires to serve his generation well, royalty, political power, even municipal office offer many excellent opportunities. But set kingship on this side, kingship concerned with the temporal and earthly, or at best humane aspects of life, and on the other side priesthood of the true kind which has to do with the spiritual, by which God is revealed to man and the holy ardour and divine aspirations of the human will are sustained —and there can be no question which is the more important. A clever strong man may be a ruler. It needs a good man, a pious man, a man of heavenly power and insight to be in any right sense a priest. I speak not of the kind of priest Gideon turned out, nor of a Jewish priest, nor of any one who in modern times professes to be in that succession, but of one who really stands between God and men, bearing the sorrows of his kind, their trials, doubts, cries and prayers on his heart and presenting them to God, interpreting to the weary and sad and troubled the messages of heaven. In this sense Christ is the one True Priest, the eternal and only sufficient High Priest. And in this sense it is possible for every Christian to hold towards those less enlightened and less decided in their faith the priestly part.

Now in a dim way the priestly function presented itself to Gideon and allured him. Sufficient for it he was not, and his ephod became a snare. Neither could he grasp the wisdom of heaven nor understand the needs of men. In his hands the sacred art did not prosper, he became content with the appearance and the gain. It is so with many who take the name of priests. In truth on one side the term and all it

stands for must be confessed full of danger to him set apart and those who separate him. Here as pointedly as anywhere must it be affirmed, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." There must be a mastering sense of God's calling on the side of him who ministers, and on the side of the people recognition of a message, an example coming to them through this brother of theirs who speaks what he has received of the Holy Spirit, who offers a personal living word, a personal testimony. Here, be it called what it may, is priesthood after the pattern of Christ's, true and beneficent; and apart from this, priesthood may too easily become, as many have affirmed, a horrible imposture and baleful lie. Christianity brings the whole to a point in every life. God's calling, spiritual, complete, comes to each soul in its place, and the holy oil is for every head. The father, mother, the employer and the workman, the surgeon, writer, lawyer—everywhere and in all posts, just as men and women are living out God's demand upon them—these are His priests, ministrants of the hearth and the shop, the factory and the office, by the cradle and the sick-bed, wherever the multitudinous epic of life goes forward. Here is the common and withal the holiest calling and office. That one dwelling with God in righteousness and love introduce others into the sanctuary, declare as a thing he knows the will of the Eternal, uplift the feebleness of faith and revive the heart of love—this is the highest task on earth, the grandest of heaven. Of such it may be said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should show forth the praises of Him Who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

XV.

ABIMELECH AND JOTHAM.

JUDGES viii. 29—ix. 57.

THE history we are tracing moves from man to man; the personal influence of the hero is everything while it lasts and confusion follows on his death. Gideon appears as one of the most successful Hebrew judges in maintaining order. While he was there in Ophrah religion and government had a centre "and the country was in quietness forty years." A man far from perfect but capable of mastery held the reins and gave forth judgment with an authority none could challenge. His burial in the family sepulchre in Ophrah is specially recorded as if it had been a great national tribute to his heroic power and skilful administration.

The funeral over, discord began. A rightful ruler there was not. Among the claimants of power there was no man of power. Gideon left many sons, but not one of them could take his place. The confederation of cities half Hebrew, half Canaanite with Shechem at their head, of which we have already heard, held in check while Gideon lived, now began to control the politics of the tribes. By using the influence of this league a usurper who had no title whatever to the confidence of the people succeeded in exalting himself.

The old town of Shechem situated in the beautiful valley between Ebal and Gerizim had long been a centre of Baal worship and of Canaanite intrigue, though nominally one of the cities of refuge and therefore specially sacred. Very likely the mixed population of this important town, jealous of the position gained by the hill-village of Ophrah, were ready to receive with favour any proposals that seemed to offer them distinction. And when Abimelech, son of Gideon by a slave woman of their town, went among them with ambitious and crafty suggestions they were easily persuaded to help him. The desire for a king which Gideon had promptly set aside lingered in the minds of the people, and by means of it Abimelech was able to compass his personal ends. First, however, he had to discredit others who stood in his way. There at Ophrah were the sons and grandsons of Gideon, threescore and ten of them according to the tradition, who were supposed to be bent on lording it over the tribes. Was it a thing to be thought of that the land should have seventy kings? Surely one would be better, less of an incubus at least, more likely to do the ruling well. Men of Shechem too would not be governed from Ophrah if they had any spirit. He, Abimelech, was their townsman, their bone and flesh. He confidently looked for their support.

We cannot tell how far there was reason for saying that the family of Gideon were aiming at an aristocracy. They may have had some vague purpose of the kind. The suggestion, at all events, was cunning and had its effect. The people of Shechem had stored considerable treasure in the sanctuary of Baal, and by public vote seventy pieces of silver were paid out of it to Abimelech. The money was at once used by him in hiring a band of

men like himself, unscrupulous, ready for any desperate or bloody deed. With these he marched on Ophrah and surprising his brothers in the house or palace of Jerubbaal speedily put out of his way their dangerous rivalry. With the exception of Jotham, who had observed the band approaching and concealed himself, the whole house of Gideon was dragged to execution. On one stone, perhaps the very rock on which the altar of Baal once stood, the threescore and nine were barbarously slain.

A villainous *coup d'état* this. From Gideon overthrowing Baal and proclaiming Jehovah to Abimelech bringing up Baal again with hideous fratricide—it is a wretched turn of things. Gideon had to some extent prepared the way for a man far inferior to himself, as all do who are not utterly faithful to their light and calling; but he never imagined there could be so quick and shocking a revival of barbarism. Yet the ephod-dealing, the polygamy, the immorality into which he lapsed were bound to come to fruit. The man who once was a pure Hebrew patriot begat a half-heathen son to undo his own work. As for the Shechemites, they knew quite well to what end they had voted those seventy pieces of silver; and the general opinion seems to have been that the town had its money's worth, a life for each piece and, to boot, a king reeking with blood and shame. Surely it was a well-spent grant. Their confederation, their god had triumphed. They made Abimelech king by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem.

It is the success of the adventurer we have here, that common event. Abimelech is the oriental adventurer and uses the methods of another age than ours; yet we have our examples, and if they are less scan-

dalous in some ways, if they are apart from bloodshed and savagery, they are still sufficiently trying to those who cherish the faith of divine justice and providence. How many have to see with amazement the adventurer triumph by means of seventy pieces of silver from the house of Baal or even from a holier treasury. He in a selfish and cruel game seems to have speedy and complete success denied to the best and purest cause. Fighting for his own hand in wicked or contemptuous hardness and arrogant conceit, he finds support, applause, an open way. Being no prophet he has honour in his own town. He knows the art of the stealthy insinuation, the lying promise and the flattering murmur; he has skill to make the favour of one leading person a step to securing another. When a few important people have been hoodwinked, he too becomes important and "success" is assured.

The Bible, most entirely honest of books, frankly sets before us this adventurer, Abimelech, in the midst of the judges of Israel, as low a specimen of "success" as need be looked for; and we trace the well-known means by which such a person is promoted. "His mother's brethren spake of him in the ears of all the men of Shechem." That there was little to say, that he was a man of no character mattered not the least. The thing was to create an impression so that Abimelech's scheme might be introduced and forced. So far he could intrigue and then, the first steps gained, he could mount. But there was in him none of the mental power that afterwards marked Jehu, none of the charm that survives with the name of Absalom. It was on jealousy, pride, ambition he played as the most jealous, proud and ambitious; yet for three years the Hebrews of the league, blinded by the desire to have

their nation like others, suffered him to bear the name of king.

And by this sovereignty the Israelites who acknowledged it were doubly and trebly compromised. Not only did they accept a man without a record, they believed in one who was an enemy to his country's religion, one therefore quite ready to trample upon its liberty. This is really the beginning of a worse oppression than that of Midian or of Jabin. It shows on the part of Hebrews generally as well as those who tamely submitted to Abimelech's lordship a most abject state of mind. After the bloody work at Ophrah the tribes should have rejected the fratricide with loathing and risen like one man to suppress him. If the Baal-worshippers of Shechem would make him king there ought to have been a cause of war against them in which every good man and true should have taken the field. We look in vain for any such opposition to the usurper. Now that he is crowned, Manasseh, Ephraim and the North regard him complacently. It is the world all over. How can we wonder at this when we know with what acclamations kings scarcely more reputable than he have been greeted in modern times? Crowds gather and shout, fires of welcome blaze; there is joy as if the millennium had come. It is a king crowned, restored, his country's head, defender of the faith. Vain is the hope, pathetic the joy.

There is no man of spirit to oppose Abimelech in the field. The duped nation must drink its cup of misrule and blood. But one appears of keen wit, apt and trenchant in speech. At least the tribes shall hear what one sound mind thinks of this coronation. Jotham, as we saw, escaped the slaughter at Ophrah. In the rear of the murderer he has crossed the hills and he

will now utter his warning, whether men hear or whether they forbear. There is a crowd assembled for worship or deliberation at the oak of the pillar. Suddenly a voice is heard ringing clearly out between hill and hill, and the people looking up recognize Jotham who from a spur of rock on the side of Gerizim demands their audience. "Hearken unto me," he cries, "ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you." Then in his parable of the olive, the fig-tree, the vine and the bramble, he pronounces judgment and prophecy. The bramble is exalted to be king, but on these terms, that the trees come and put their trust under its shadow; "but if not, then let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

It is a piece of satire of the first order, brief, stinging, true. The craving for a king is lashed and then the wonderful choice of a ruler. Jotham speaks as an anarchist, one might say, but with God understood as the centre of law and order. It is a vision of the Theocracy taking shape from a keen and original mind. He figures men as trees growing independently, dutifully. And do trees need a king? Are they not set in their natural freedom each to yield fruit as best it can after its kind? Men of Shechem, Hebrews all, if they will only attend to their proper duties and do quiet work as God wills, appear to Jotham to need a king no more than the trees. Under the benign course of nature, sunshine and rain, wind and dew, the trees have all the restraint they need, all the liberty that is good for them. So men under the providence of God, adoring and obeying Him, have the best control, the only needful control, and with it liberty. Are they not fools then to go about seeking a tyrant to rule them, they who should be as cedars of Lebanon, wil-

lows by the watercourses, they who are made for simple freedom and spontaneous duty? It is something new in Israel this keen intellectualizing; but the fable, pointed as it is, teaches nothing for the occasion. Jotham is a man full of wit and of intelligence, but he has no practicable scheme of government, nothing definite to oppose to the mistake of the hour. He is all for the ideal, but the time and the people are unripe for the ideal. We see the same contrast in our own day; both in politics and the church the incisive critic discrediting subordination altogether fails to secure his age. Men are not trees. They are made to obey and trust. A hero or one who seems a hero is ever welcome, and he who skilfully imitates the roar of the lion may easily have a following, while Jotham, intensely sincere, highly gifted, a true-sighted man, finds none to mind him.

Again the fable is directed against Abimelech. What was this man to whom Shechem had sworn fealty? An olive, a fig-tree, fruitful and therefore to be sought after? Was he a vine capable of rising on popular support to useful and honourable service? Not he. It was the bramble they had chosen, the poor grovelling jagged thorn-bush that tears the flesh, whose end is to feed the fire of the oven. Who ever heard of a good or heroic deed Abimelech had done? He was simply a contemptible upstart, without moral principle, as ready to wound as to flatter, and they who chose him for king would too soon find their error. Now that he had done something, what was it? There were Israelites among the crowd that shouted in his honour. Had they already forgotten the services of Gideon so completely as to fall down before a wretch red-handed from the murder of their hero's sons? Such a begin-

ning showed the character of the man they trusted, and the same fire which had issued from the bramble at Ophrah would flame out upon themselves. This was but the beginning; soon there would be war to the knife between Abimelech and Shechem.

We find instruction in the parable by regarding the answers put into the mouth of this tree and that when they are invited to wave to and fro over the others. There are honours which are dearly purchased, high positions which cannot be assumed without renouncing the true end and fruition of life. One for example who is quietly and with increasing efficiency doing his part in a sphere to which he is adapted must set aside the gains of long discipline if he is to become a social leader. He can do good where he is. Not so certain is it that he will be able to serve his fellows well in public office. It is one thing to enjoy the deference paid to a leader while the first enthusiasm on his behalf continues, but it is quite another thing to satisfy all the demands made as years go on and new needs arise. When any one is invited to take a position of authority he is bound to consider carefully his own aptitudes. He needs also to consider those who are to be subjects or constituents and make sure that they are of the kind his rule will fit. The olive looks at the cedar and the terebinth and the palm. Will they admit his sovereignty by-and-by though now they vote for it? Men are taken with the candidate who makes a good impression by emphasizing what will please and suppressing opinions that may provoke dissent. When they know him, how will it be? When criticism begins, will the olive not be despised for its gnarled stem, its crooked branches and dusky foliage?

The fable does not make the refusal of olive and fig-

tree and vine rest on the comfort they enjoy in the humbler place. That would be a mean and dishonourable reason for refusing to serve. Men who decline public office because they love an easy life find here no countenance. It is for the sake of its fatness, the oil it yields, grateful to God and man in sacrifice and anointing, that the olive-tree declines. The fig-tree has its sweetness and the vine its grapes to yield. And so men despising self-indulgence and comfort may be justified in putting aside a call to office. The fruit of personal character developed in humble unobtrusive natural life is seen to be better than the more showy clusters forced by public demands. Yet, on the other hand, if one will not leave his books, another his scientific hobbies, a third his fireside, a fourth his manufactory, in order to take his place among the magistrates of a city or the legislators of a land the danger of bramble supremacy is near. Next a wretched Abimelech will appear; and what can be done but set him on high and put the reins in his hand? Unquestionably the claims of church or country deserve most careful weighing, and even if there is a risk that character may lose its tender bloom the sacrifice must be made in obedience to an urgent call. For a time, at least, the need of society at large must rule the loyal life.

The fable of Jotham, in so far as it flings sarcasm at the persons who desire eminence for the sake of it and not for the good they will be able to do, is an example of that wisdom which is as unpopular now as ever it has been in human history, and the moral needs every day to be kept full in view. It is desire for distinction and power, the opportunity of waving to and fro over the trees, the right to use this handle and that to their

names that will be found to make many eager, not the distinct wish to accomplish something which the times and the country need. Those who solicit public office are far too often selfish, not self-denying, and even in the church there is much vain ambition. But people will have it so. The crowd follows him who is eager for the suffrages of the crowd and showers flattery and promises as he goes. Men are lifted into places they cannot fill, and after keeping their seats unsteadily for a time they have to disappear into ignominy.

We pass here, however, beyond the meaning Jotham desired to convey, for, as we have seen, he would have justified every one in refusing to reign. And certainly if society could be held together and guided without the exaltation of one over another, by the fidelity of each to his own task and brotherly feeling between man and man, there would be a far better state of things. But while the fable expounds a God-impelled anarchy, the ideal state of mankind, our modern schemes, omitting God, repudiating the least notion of a supernatural fount of life, turn upon themselves in hopeless confusion. When the divine law rules every life we shall not need organised governments; until then entire freedom in the world is but a name for unchaining every lust that degrades and darkens the life of man. Far away, as a hope of the redeemed and Christ-led race, there shines the ideal Theocracy revealed to the greater minds of the Hebrew people, often re-stated, never realised. But at present men need a visible centre of authority. There must be administrators and executors of law, there must be government and legislation till Christ reigns in every heart. The movement which resulted in Abimelech's sovereignty was the blundering start in a series of experiments the

Hebrew tribes were bound to make, as other nations had to make them. We are still engaged in the search for a right system of social order, and while fearers of God acknowledge the ideal towards which they labour, they must endeavour to secure by personal toil and devotion, by unwearying interest in affairs the most effective form of liberal yet firm government.

Abimelech maintained himself in power for three years, no doubt amid growing dissatisfaction. Then came the outburst which Jotham had predicted. An evil spirit, really present from the first, rose between Abimelech and the men of Shechem. The bramble began to tear themselves, a thing they were not prepared to endure. Once rooted however it was not easily got rid of. One who knows the evil arts of betrayal is quick to suspect treachery, the false person knows the ways of the false and how to fight them with their own weapons. A man of high character may be made powerless by the disclosure of some true words he has spoken; but when Shechem would be rid of Abimelech it has to employ brigands and organise robbery. "They set liers in wait for him in the mountains who robbed all that came along that way," the merchants no doubt to whom Abimelech had given a safe conduct. Shechem in fact became the headquarters of a band of highwaymen whose crimes were condoned or even approved in the hope that one day the despot would be taken and an end put to his misrule.

It may appear strange that our attention is directed to these vulgar incidents, as they may be called, which were taking place in and about Shechem. Why has the historian not chosen to tell us of other regions where some fear of God survived and guided the lives of men,

instead of giving in detail the intrigues and treacheries of Abimelech and his rebellious subjects? Would we not much rather hear of the sanctuary and the worship, of the tribe of Judah and its development, of men and women who in the obscurity of private life were maintaining the true faith and serving God in sincerity? The answer must be partly that the contents of the history are determined by the traditions which survived when it was compiled. Doings like these at Shechem keep their place in the memory of men not because they are important but because they impress themselves on popular feeling. This was the beginning of the experiments which finally in Samuel's time issued in the kingship of Saul, and although Abimelech was, properly speaking, not a Hebrew and certainly was no worshipper of Jehovah, yet the fact that he was king for a time gave importance to everything about him. Hence we have the full account of his rise and fall.

And yet the narrative before us has its value from the religious point of view. It shows the disastrous result of that coalition with idolaters into which the Hebrews about Shechem entered, it illustrates the danger of co-partnery with the worldly on worldly terms. The confederacy of which Shechem was the centre is a type of many in which people who should be guided always by religion bind themselves for business or political ends with those who have no fear of God before their eyes. Constantly it happens in such cases that the interests of the commercial enterprise or of the party are considered before the law of righteousness. The business affair must be made to succeed at all hazards. Christian people as partners of companies are committed to schemes which imply Sabbath work, sharp practices in buying and selling.

hollow promises in prospectuses and advertisements, grinding of the faces of the poor, miserable squabbles about wages that should never occur. In politics the like is frequently seen. Things are done against the true instincts of many members of a party; but they, for the sake of the party, must be silent or even take their places on platforms and write in periodicals defending what in their souls and consciences they know to be wrong. The modern Baal-Berith is a tyrannical god, ruins the morals of many a worshipper and destroys the peace of many a circle. Perhaps Christian people will by-and-by become careful in regard to the schemes they join and the zeal with which they fling themselves into party strife. It is high time they did. Even distinguished and pious leaders are unsafe guides when popular cries have to be gratified; and if the principles of Christianity are set aside by a government every Christian church and every Christian voice should protest, come of parties what may. Or rather, the party of Christ, which is always in the van, ought to have our complete allegiance. Conservatism is sometimes right. Liberalism is sometimes right. But to bow down to any Baal of the League is a shameful thing for a professed servant of the King of kings.

Against Abimelech the adventurer there arose another of the same stamp, Gaal son of Ebed, that is the *Abhorred*, son of a slave. In him the men of Shechem put their confidence such as it was. At the festival of vintage there was a demonstration of a truly barbarous sort. High carousal was held in the temple of Baal. There were loud curses of Abimelech and Gaal made a speech. His argument was that this Abimelech, though his mother belonged to Shechem, was yet also the son of Baal's adversary, far too much

of a Hebrew to govern Canaanites and good servants of Baal. Shechemites should have a true Shechemite to rule them. Would to Baal, he cried, this people were under my hand, then would I remove Abimelech. His speech, no doubt, was received with great applause, and there and then he challenged the absent king.

Zebul, prefect of the city, who was present, heard all this with anger. He was of Abimelech's party still and immediately informed his chief, who lost no time in marching on Shechem to suppress the revolt. According to a common plan of warfare he divided his troops into four companies and in the early morning these crept towards the city, one by a track across the mountains, another down the valley from the west, the third by way of the Diviners' Oak, the fourth perhaps marching from the plain of Mamre by way of Jacob's well. The first engagement drove the Shechemites into their city, and on the following day the place was taken, sacked and destroyed. Some distance from Shechem, probably up the valley to the west, stood a tower or sanctuary of Baal around which a considerable village had gathered. The people there, seeing the fate of the lower town, betook themselves to the tower and shut themselves up within it. But Abimelech ordered his men to provide themselves with branches of trees, which were piled against the door of the temple and set on fire, and all within were smothered or burned to the number of a thousand.

At Thebez, another of the confederate cities, the pretender met his death. In the siege of the tower which stood within the walls of Thebez the horrible expedient of burning was again attempted. Abimelech directing the operations had pressed close to the door when a woman cast an upper millstone from the

parapet with so true an aim as to break his skull. So ended the first experiment in the direction of monarchy; so also God requited the wickedness of Abimelech.

One turns from these scenes of bloodshed and cruelty with loathing. Yet they show what human nature is, and how human history would shape itself apart from the faith and obedience of God. We are met by obvious warnings; but so often does the evidence of divine judgment seem to fail, so often do the wicked prosper that it is from another source than observation of the order of things in this world we must obtain the necessary impulse to higher life. It is only as we wait on the guidance and obey the impulses of the Spirit of God that we shall move towards the justice and brotherhood of a better age. And those who have received the light and found the will of the Spirit must not slacken their efforts on behalf of religion. Gideon did good service in his day, yet failing in faithfulness he left the nation scarcely more earnest, his own family scarcely instructed. Let us not think that religion can take care of itself. Heavenly justice and truth are committed to us. The Christ-life generous, pure, holy must be commended by us if it is to rule the world. The persuasion that mankind is to be saved in and by the earthly survives, and against that most obstinate of all delusions we are to stand in constant resolute protest, counting every needful sacrifice our simple duty, our highest glory. The task of the faithful is no easier to-day than it was a thousand years ago. Men and women can be treacherous still with heathen cruelty and falseness; they can be vile still with heathen vileness, though wearing the air of the highest civilization. If ever the people of God had a work to do in the world they have it now.

XVI.

GILEAD AND ITS CHIEF.

JUDGES x. 1—xi. 11.

THE scene of the history shifts now to the east of Jordan, and we learn first of the influence which the region called Gilead was coming to have in Hebrew development from the brief notice of a chief named Jair who held the position of judge for twenty-two years. Tola, a man of Issachar, succeeded Abimelech, and Jair followed Tola. In the Book of Numbers we are informed that the children of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it and dispossessed the Amorites which were therein; and Moses gave Gilead unto Machir the son of Manasseh. It is added that Jair the son or descendant of Manasseh went and took the towns of Gilead and called them Havvoth-jair; and in this statement the Book of Numbers anticipates the history of the judges.

Gilead is described by modern travellers as one of the most varied districts of Palestine. The region is mountainous and its peaks rise to three and even four thousand feet above the trough of the Jordan. The southern part is beautiful and fertile, watered by the Jabbok and other streams that flow westward from the hills. "The valleys green with corn, the streams fringed with oleander, the magnificent screens of yellow-

green and russet foliage which cover the steep slopes present a scene of quiet beauty, of chequered light and shade of uneastern aspect which makes Mount Gilead a veritable land of promise." "No one," says another writer, "can fairly judge of Israel's heritage who has not seen the exuberance of Gilead as well as the hard rocks of Judæa which only yield their abundance to reward constant toil and care." In Gilead the rivers flow in summer as well as in winter, and they are filled with fishes and fresh-water shells. While in Western Palestine the soil is insufficient now to support a large population, beyond Jordan improved cultivation alone is needed to make the whole district a garden.

To the north and east of Gilead lie Bashan and that extraordinary volcanic region called the Argob or the Lejah where the Havvoth-jair or towns of Jair were situated. The traveller who approaches this singular district from the north sees it rising abruptly from the plain, the edge of it like a rampart about twenty feet high. It is of a rude oval shape, some twenty miles long from north to south, and fifteen in breadth, and is simply a mass of dark jagged rocks, with clefts between in which were built not a few cities and villages. The whole of this Argob or Stony Land, Jephthah's land of Tob, is a natural fortification, a sanctuary open only to those who have the secret of the perilous paths that wind along savage cliff and deep defile. One who established himself here might soon acquire the fame and authority of a chief, and Jair, acknowledged by the Manassites as their judge, extended his power and influence among the Gadites and Reubenites farther south.

But plenty of corn and wine and oil and the advantage of a natural fortress which might have been held

against any foe did not avail the Hebrews when they were corrupted by idolatry. In the land of Gilead and Bashan they became a hardy and vigorous race, and yet when they gave themselves up to the influence of the Syrians, Sidonians, Ammonites and Moabites, forsaking the Lord and serving the gods of these peoples, disaster overtook them. The Ammonites were ever on the watch, and now, stronger than for centuries in consequence of the defeat of Midian and Amalek by Gideon, they fell on the Hebrews of the east, subdued them and even crossed Jordan and fought with the southern tribes so that Israel was sore distressed.

We have found reason to suppose that during the many turmoils of the north the tribes of Judah and Simeon and to some extent Ephraim were pleased to dwell secure in their own domains, giving little help to their kinsfolk. Deborah and Barak got no troops from the south, and it was with a grudge Ephraim joined in the pursuit of Midian. Now the time has come for the harvest of selfish content. Supposing the people of Judah to have been specially engaged with religion and the arranging of worship—that did not justify their neglect of the political troubles of the north. It was a poor religion then, as it is a poor religion now, that could exist apart from national well-being and patriotic duty. Brotherhood must be realised in the nation as well as in the church, and piety must fulfil itself through patriotism as well as in other ways.

No doubt the duties we owe to each other and to the nation of which we form a part are imposed by natural conditions which have arisen in the course of history, and some may think that the natural should give way to the spiritual. They may see the interests of a kingdom of this world as actually opposed to

the interests of the kingdom of God. The apostles of Christ, however, did not set the human and divine in contrast, as if God in His providence had nothing to do with the making of a nation. "The powers that be are ordained of God," says St. Paul in writing to the Romans; and again in his First Epistle to Timothy, "I exhort that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made for all men: for kings and all that are in high place, that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity." To the same effect St. Peter says, "Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." Natural and secular enough were the authorities to which submission was thus enjoined. The policy of Rome was of the earth earthy. The wars it waged, the intrigues that went on for power savoured of the most carnal ambition. Yet as members of the commonwealth Christians were to submit to the Roman magistrates and intercede with God on their behalf, observing closely and intelligently all that went on, taking due part in affairs. No room was to be given for the notion that the Christian society meant a new political centre. In our own times there is a duty which many never understand, or which they easily imagine is being fulfilled for them. Let religious people be assured that generous and intelligent patriotism is demanded of them and attention to the political business of the time. Those who are careless will find, as did the people of Judah, that in neglecting the purity of government and turning a deaf ear to cries for justice, they are exposing their country to disaster and their religion to reproach.

We are told that the Israelites of Gilead worshipped the gods of the Phœnicians and Syrians, of the Moabites and of the Ammonites. Whatever religious rites took

their fancy they were ready to adopt. This will be to their credit in some quarters as a mark of openness of mind, intelligence and taste. They were not bigoted; other men's ways in religion and civilization were not rejected as beneath their regard. The argument is too familiar to be traced more fully. Briefly it may be said that if catholicity could save a race Israel should rarely have been in trouble, and certainly not at this time. One name by which the Hebrews knew God was *El* or *Elohim*. When they found among the gods of the Sidonians one called El, the careless-minded supposed that there could be no harm in joining in his worship. Then came the notion that the other divinities of the Phœnician Pantheon, such as Melcarth, Dagon, Derketo, might be adored as well. Very likely they found zeal and excitement in the alien religious gatherings which their own had lost. So they slipped into practical heathenism.

And the process goes on among ourselves. Through the principles that culture means artistic freedom and that worship is a form of art we arrive at taste or liking as the chief test. Intensity of feeling is craved and religion must satisfy that or be despised. It is the very error that led Hebrews to the feasts of Astarte and Adonis, and whither it tends we can see in the old history. Turning from the strong earnest gospel which grasps intellect and will to shows and ceremonies that please the eye, or even to music refined and devotional that stirs and thrills the feelings, we decline from the reality of religion. Moreover a serious danger threatens us in the far too common teaching which makes little of truth everything of charity. Christ was most charitable, but it is through the knowledge and practice of truth He offers freedom. He is our King by His witness-

bearing not to charity but to truth. Those who are anxious to keep us from bigotry and tell us that meekness, gentleness and love are more than doctrine mislead the mind of the age. Truth in regard to God and His covenant is the only foundation on which life can be securely built, and without right thinking there cannot be right living. A man may be amiable, humble, patient and kind though he has no doctrinal belief and his religion is of the purely emotional sort; but it is the truth, believed by previous generations, fought and suffered for by stronger men, not his own gratification of taste that keeps him in the right way. And when the influence of that truth decays there will remain no anchorage, neither compass nor chart for the voyage. He will be like a wave of the sea driven of the wind and tossed.

Again, the religious so far as they have wisdom and strength are required to be pioneers, which they can never be in following fancy or taste. Here nothing but strenuous thought, patient faithful obedience can avail. Hebrew history is the story of a pioneer people and every lapse from fidelity was serious, the future of humanity being at stake. Each Christian society and believer has work of the same kind not less important, and failures due to intellectual sloth and moral levity are as dishonourable as they are hurtful to the human race. Some of our heretics now are more serious than Christians, and they give thought and will more earnestly to the opinions they try to propagate. While the professed servants of Christ, who should be marching in the van, are amusing themselves with the accessories of religion, the resolute socialist or nihilist reasoning and speaking with the heat of conviction leads the masses where he will.

The Ammonite oppression made the Hebrews feel keenly the uselessness of heathenism. Baal and Melcarth had been thought of as real divinities, exercising power in some region or other of earth or heaven, and Israel's had been an easy backsliding. Idolatry did not appear as darkness to people who had never been fully in the light. But when trouble came and help was sorely needed they began to see that the Baalim were nothing. What could these idols do for men oppressed and at their wits' end? Religion was of no avail unless it brought an assurance of One Whose strong hand could reach from land to land, Whose grace and favour could revive sad and troubled souls. Heathenism was found utterly barren, and Israel turned to Jehovah the God of its fathers. "We have sinned against Thee even because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baalim."

Those who now fall away from faith are in worse case by far than Israel. They have no thought of a real power that can befriend them. It is to mere abstractions they have given the divine name. In sin and sorrow alike they remain with ideas only, with bare terms of speculation in which there is no life, no strength, no hope for the moral nature. They are men and have to live; but with the living God they have entirely broken. In trouble they can only call on the Abyss or the Immensities, and there is no way of repentance though they seek it carefully with tears. At heart therefore they are pessimists without resource. Sadness deep and deadly ever waits upon such unbelief, and our religion to-day suffers the gloom because it is infected by the uncertainties and denials of an agnosticism at once positive and confused.

Another paganism, that of gathering and doing in

the world-sphere, is constantly beside us, drawing multitudes from fidelity to Christ as Baal-worship drew Israel from Jehovah, and it is equally barren in the sharp experiences of humanity. Earthly things venerated in the ardour of business and the pursuit of social distinction appear as impressive realities only while the soul sleeps. Let it be aroused by some overturn of the usual, one of those floods that sweep suddenly down on the cities which fill the valley of life, and there is a quick pathetic confession of the truth. The soul needs help now, and its help must come from the Eternal Spirit. We must have done with mere saying of prayers and begin to pray. We must find access if access is to be had to the secret place of the Most High on Whose mercy we depend to redeem us from bondage and fear. Sad therefore is it for those who having never learned to seek the throne of divine succour are swept by the wild deluge from their temples and their gods. It is a cry of despair they raise amid the swelling torrent. You who now by the sacred oracles and the mediation of Christ can come into the fellowship of eternal life be earnest and eager in the cultivation of your faith. The true religion of God which avails the soul in its extremity is not to be had in a moment, when suddenly its help is needed. That confidence which has been established in the mind by serious thought, by the habit of prayer and reliance on divine wisdom can alone bring help when the foundations of the earthly are destroyed.

To Israel troubled and contrite came as on previous occasions a prophetic message; and it was spoken by one of those incisive ironic preachers who were born from time to time among this strangely heathen, strangely believing people. It is in terms of earnest

remonstrance he speaks, at first almost going the length of declaring that there is no hope for the rebellious and ungrateful tribes. They found it an easy thing to turn from their Divine King to the gods they chose to worship. Now they perhaps expect as easy a recovery of His favour. But healing must begin with deeper wounding, and salvation with much keener anxiety. This prophet knows the need for utter seriousness of soul. As he loves and yearns over his country-folk he must so deal with them; it is God's way, the only way to save. Most irrationally, against all sound principles of judgment they had abandoned the Living One, the Eternal to worship hideous idols like Moloch and Dagon. It was wicked because it was wilfully stupid and perverse. And Jehovah says, "I will save you no more. Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them save you in the day of your distress." The rebuke is stinging. The preacher makes the people feel the wretched insufficiency of their hope in the false, and the great strong pressure upon them of the Almighty, Whom, even in neglect, they cannot escape. We are pointed forward to the terrible pathos of Jeremiah:—"Who shall have pity upon thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall turn aside to ask of thy welfare? Thou hast rejected me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward: therefore have I stretched out my hand against thee, and destroyed thee: I am weary with repenting."

And notice to what state of mind the Hebrews were brought. Renewing their confession they said, "Do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto Thee." They would be content to suffer now at the hand of God whatever He chose to inflict on them. They themselves would have exacted heavy tribute of a subject

people that had rebelled and came suing for pardon. Perhaps they would have slain every tenth man. Jehovah might appoint retribution of the same kind; He might afflict them with pestilence; He might require them to offer a multitude of sacrifices. Men who traffic with idolatry and adopt gross notions of revengeful gods are certain to carry back with them when they return to the better faith many of the false ideas they have gathered. And it is just possible that a demand for human sacrifices was at this time attributed to God, the general feeling that they might be necessary connecting itself with Jephthah's vow.

It is idle to suppose that Israelites who persistently lapsed into paganism could at any time, because they repented, find the spiritual thoughts they had lost. True those thoughts were at the heart of the national life, there always even when least felt. But thousands of Hebrews even in a generation of reviving faith died with but a faint and shadowy personal understanding of Jehovah. Everything in the Book of Judges goes to show that the mass of the people were nearer the level of their neighbours the Moabites and Ammonites than the piety of the Psalms. A remarkable ebb and flow are observable in the history of the race. Look at some facts and there seems to be decline. Samson is below Gideon, and Gideon below Deborah; no man of leading until Isaiah can be named with Moses. Yet ever and anon there are prophetic calls and voices out of a spiritual region into which the people as a whole do not enter, voices to which they listen only when distressed and overborne. Worldliness increases, for the world opens to the Hebrew; but it often disappoints, and still there are some to whom the heavenly secret is told. The race as a whole is not becoming more

devout and holy, but the few are gaining a clearer vision as one experience after another is recorded. The antithesis is the same we see in the Christian centuries. Is the multitude more pious now than in the age when a king had to do penance for rash words spoken against an ecclesiastic? Are the churches less worldly than they were a hundred years ago? Scarcely may we affirm it. Yet there never was an age so rich as ours in the finest spirituality, the noblest Christian thought. Our van presses up to the Simplon height and is in constant touch with those who follow; but the rear is still chaffering and idling in the streets of Milan. It is in truth always by the fidelity of the remnant that humanity is saved for God.

We cannot say that when Israel repented it was in the love of holiness so much as in the desire for liberty. The ways of the heathen were followed readily, but the supremacy of the heathen was ever abominable to the vigorous Israelite. By this national spirit however God could find the tribes, and a special feature of the deliverance from Ammon is marked where we read: "The people, the princes of Gilead said one to the other, What man is he that will begin to fight against the children of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." Looking around for the fit leader they found Jephthah and agreed to invite him.

Now this shows distinct progress in the growth of the nation. There is, if nothing more, a growth in practical power. Abimelech had thrust himself upon the men of Shechem. Jephthah is chosen apart from any ambition of his own. The movement which made him judge arose out of the consciousness of the Gileadites that they could act for themselves and were bound to act for themselves. Providence indicated the

chief, but they had to be instruments of providence in making him chief. The vigour and robust intelligence of the men of Eastern Palestine come out here. They lead in the direction of true national life. While on the west of Jordan there is a fatalistic disposition, these men move. Gilead, the separated country, with the still ruder Bashan behind it and the Argob a resort of outlaws, is beneath some other regions in manners and in thought, but ahead of them in point of energy. We need not look for refinement, but we shall see power; and the chosen leader while he is something of the barbarian will be a man to leave his mark on history.

At the start we are not prepossessed in favour of Jephthah. There is some confusion in the narrative which has led to the supposition that he was a foundling of the clan. But taking Gilead as the actual name of his father, he appears as the son of a harlot, brought up in the paternal home and banished from it when there were legitimate sons able to contend with him. We get thus a brief glance at a certain rough standard of morals and see that even polygamy made sharp exclusions. Jephthah, cast out, betakes himself to the land of Tob and getting about him a band of vain fellows or freebooters becomes the Robin Hood or Rob Roy of his time. There are natural suspicions of a man who takes to a life of this kind, and yet the progress of events shows that though Jephthah was a sort of outlaw his character as well as his courage must have commended him. He and his men might occasionally seize for their own use the cattle and corn of Israelites when they were hard pressed for food. But it was generally against the Ammonites and other enemies their raids were directed, and the modern instances already cited show that no little magnanimity

and even patriotism may go along with a life of lawless adventure. If this robber chief, as some might call him, now and again levied contributions from a wealthy flock-master, the poorer Hebrews were no doubt indebted to him for timely help when bands of Ammonites swept through the land. Something of this we must read into the narrative otherwise the elders of Gilead would not so unanimously and urgently have invited him to become their head.

Jephthah was not at first disposed to believe in the good faith of those who gave him the invitation. Among the heads of households who came he saw his own brothers who had driven him to the hills. He must have more than suspected that they only wished to make use of him in their emergency and, the fighting over, would set him aside. He therefore required an oath of the men that they would really accept him as chief and obey him. That given he assumed the command.

And here the religious character of the man begins to appear. At Mizpah on the verge of the wilderness where the Israelites, driven northward by the victories of Ammon, had their camp there stood an ancient cairn or heap of stones which preserved the tradition of a sacred covenant and still retained the savour of sanctity. There it was that Jacob fleeing from Padan-aram on his way back to Canaan was overtaken by Laban, and there raising the Cairn of Witness they swore in the sight of Jehovah to be faithful to each other. The belief still lingered that the old monument was a place of meeting between man and God. To it Jephthah repaired at this new point in his life. No more an adventurer, no more an outlaw, but the chosen leader of eastern Israel, "he spake all his words before

Jehovah in Mizpah." He had his life to review there, and that could not be done without serious thought. He had a new and strenuous future opened to him. Jephthah the outcast, the unnamed, was to be leader in a tremendous national struggle. The bold Gileadite feels the burden of the task. He has to question himself, to think of Jehovah. Hitherto he has been doing his own business and to that he has felt quite equal; now with large responsibility comes a sense of need. For a fight with society he has been strong enough; but can he be sure of himself as God's man, fighting against Ammon? Not a few words but many would he have to utter as on the hill-top in the silence he lifted up his soul to God and girt himself in holy resolution as a father and a Hebrew to do his duty in the day of battle.

Thus we pass from doubt of Jephthah to the hope that the banished man, the free-booter will yet prove to be an Israelite indeed, of sterling character, whose religion, very rude perhaps, has a deep strain of reality and power. Jephthah at the cairn of Mizpah lifting up his hands in solemn invocation of the God of Jacob reminds us that there are great traditions of the past of our nation and of our most holy faith to which we are bound to be true, that there is a God our witness and our judge in Whose strength alone we can live and do nobly. For the service of humanity and the maintenance of faith we need to be in close touch with the brave and good of other days and in the story of their lives find quickening for our own. Along the same line and succession we are to bear our testimony, and no link of connection with the Divine Power is to be missed which the history of the men of faith supplies. Yet as our personal Helper especially we must know

God. Hearing His call to ourselves we must lift the standard and go forth to the battle of life. Who can serve his family and friends, who can advance the well-being of the world, unless he has entered into that covenant with the Living God which raises mortal insufficiency to power and makes weak and ignorant men instruments of a divine redemption?

XVII.

THE TERRIBLE VOW.

Judges xi. 12-40.

AT every stage of their history the Hebrews were capable of producing men of passionate religiousness. And this appears as a distinction of the group of nations to which they belong. The Arab of the present time has the same quality. He can be excited to a holy war in which thousands perish. With the battle-cry of Allah and his Prophet he forgets fear. He presents a different mingling of character from the Saxon,—turbulence and reverence, sometimes apart, then blending—magnanimity and a tremendous want of magnanimity; he is fierce and generous, now rising to vivid faith, then breaking into earthly passion. We have seen the type in Deborah. David is the same and Elijah; and Jephthah is the Gileadite, the border Arab. In each of these there is quick leaping at life and beneath hot impulse a strain of brooding thought with moments of intense inward trouble. As we follow the history we must remember the kind of man it presents to us. There is humanity as it is in every race, daring in effort, tender in affection, struggling with ignorance yet thoughtful of God and duty, triumphing here, defeated there. And there is the Syrian with the heat of the sun in his blood and the shadow of

Moloch on his heart, a son of the rude hills and of barbaric times, yet with a dignity, a sense of justice, a keen upward look, the Israelite never lost in the outlaw.

So soon as Jephthah begins to act for his people, marks of a strong character are seen. He is no ordinary leader, not the mere fighter the elders of Gilead may have taken him to be. His first act is to send messengers to the king of Ammon saying, What hast thou to do with me that thou art come to fight against my land? He is a chief who desires to avert bloodshed—a new figure in the history.

Natural in those times was the appeal to arms, so natural, so customary that we must not lightly pass this trait in the character of the Gileadite judge. If we compare his policy with that of Gideon or Barak we see of course that he had different circumstances to deal with. Between Jordan and the Mediterranean the Israelites required the whole of the land in order to establish a free nationality. There was no room for Canaanite or Midianite rule side by side with their own. The dominance of Israel had to be complete and undisturbed. Hence there was no alternative to war when Jabin or Zebah and Zalmunna attacked the tribes. Might had to be invoked on behalf of right. On the other side Jordan the position was different. Away towards the desert behind the mountains of Bashan the Ammonites might find pasture for their flocks, and Moab had its territory on the slopes of the lower Jordan and the Dead Sea. It was not necessary to crush Ammon in order to give Manasseh, Gad and Reuben space enough and to spare. Yet there was a rare quality of judgment shown by the man who although called to lead in war began with

negotiation and aimed at a peaceful settlement. No doubt there was danger that the Ammonites might unite with Midian or Moab against Israel. But Jephthah hazards such a coalition. He knows the bitterness kindled by strife. He desires that Ammon, a kindred people, shall be won over to friendliness with Israel, henceforth to be an ally instead of a foe.

Now in one aspect this may appear an error in policy, and the Hebrew chief will seem especially to blame when he makes the admission that the Ammonites hold their land from Chemosh their god. Jephthah has no sense of Israel's mission to the world, no wish to convert Ammon to a higher faith, nor does Jehovah appear to him as sole King, sole object of human worship. Yet, on the other hand, if the Hebrews were to fight idolatry everywhere it is plain their swords would never have been sheathed. Phœnicia was close beside; Aram was not far away; northward the Hittites maintained their elaborate ritual. A line had to be drawn somewhere and, on the whole, we cannot but regard Jephthah as an enlightened and humane chief who wished to stir against his people and his God no hostility that could possibly be avoided. Why should not Israel conquer Ammon by justice and magnanimity, by showing the higher principles which the true religion taught? He began at all events by endeavouring to stay the quarrel, and the attempt was wise.

The king of Ammon refused Jephthah's offer to negotiate. He claimed the land bounded by the Arnon, the Jabbok and Jordan as his own and demanded that it should be peaceably given up to him. In reply Jephthah denied the claim. It was the Amorites, he said, who originally held that part of Syria. Sihon

who was defeated in the time of Moses was not an Ammonite king, but chief of the Amorites. Israel had by conquest obtained the district in dispute, and Ammon must give place.

The full account given of these messages sent by Jephthah shows a strong desire on the part of the narrator to vindicate Israel from any charge of unnecessary warfare. And it is very important that this should be understood, for the inspiration of the historian is involved. We know of nations that in sheer lust of conquest have attacked tribes whose land they did not need, and we have read histories in which wars unprovoked and cruel have been glorified. In after times the Hebrew kings brought trouble and disaster on themselves by their ambition. It would have been well if David and Solomon had followed a policy like Jephthah's rather than attempted to rival Assyria and Egypt. We see an error rather than a cause of boasting when David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: strife was thereby provoked which issued in many a sanguinary war. The Hebrews should never have earned the character of an aggressive and ambitious people that required to be kept in check by the kingdoms around. To this nation, a worldly nation on the whole, was committed a spiritual inheritance, a spiritual task. Is it asked why being worldly the Hebrews ought to have fulfilled a spiritual calling? The answer is that their best men understood and declared the Divine will, and they should have listened to their best men. Their fatal mistake was, as Christ showed, to deride their prophets, to crush and kill the messengers of God. And many other nations likewise have missed their true vocation being deluded by dreams of vast empire and earthly glory. To combat idolatry

was indeed the business of Israel and especially to drive back the heathenism that would have overwhelmed its faith; and often this had to be done with an earthly sword because liberty no less than faith was at stake. But a policy of aggression was never the duty of this people.

The temperate messages of the Hebrew chief to the king of Ammon proved to be of no avail: war alone was to settle the rival claims. And this once clear Jephthah lost no time in preparing for battle. As one who felt that without God no man can do anything, he sought assurance of divine aid; and we have now to consider the vow which he made, ever interesting on account of the moral problem it involves and the very pathetic circumstances which accompanied its fulfilment.

The terms of the solemn engagement under which Jephthah came were these:—"If Thou wilt indeed deliver the children of Ammon into mine hand, then it shall be that whatsoever" (Septuagint and Vulgate, "*whosoever*") "cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it (otherwise, *him*) for a burnt offering." And here two questions arise; the first, what he could have meant by the promise; the second, whether we can justify him in making it. As to the first, the explicit designation to God of whatever came forth of the doors of his house points unmistakably to a human life as the devoted thing. It would have been idle in an emergency like that in which Jephthah found himself, with a hazardous conflict impending that was to decide the fate of the eastern tribes at least, to anticipate the appearance of an animal, bullock, goat or sheep, and promise that in sacrifice. The form of words used in

the vow cannot be held to refer to an animal. The chief is thinking of some one who will express joy at his success and greet him as a victor. In the fulness of his heart he leaps to a wild savage mark of devotion. It is a crisis alike for him and for the people and what can he do to secure the favour and help of Jehovah? Too ready from his acquaintance with heathen sacrifices and ideas to believe that the God of Israel will be pleased with the kind of offerings by which the gods of Sidon and Aram were honoured, feeling himself as the chief of the Hebrews bound to make some great and unusual sacrifice, he does not promise that the captives taken in war shall be devoted to Jehovah, but some one of his own people is to be the victim. The dedication shall be all the more impressive that the life given up is one of which he himself shall feel the loss. A conqueror returning from war would, in ordinary circumstances, have loaded with gifts the first member of his household who came forth to welcome him. Jephthah vows to give that very person to God. The insufficient religious intelligence of the man, whose life had been far removed from elevating influences, this once perceived—and we cannot escape from the facts of the case—the vow is parallel to others of which ancient history tells. Jephthah expects some servant, some favourite slave to be the first. There is a touch of barbaric grandeur and at the same time of Roman sternness in his vow. As a chief he has the lives of all his household entirely at his disposal. To sacrifice one will be hard, for he is a humane man; but he expects that the offering will be all the more acceptable to the Most High. Such are the ideas moral and religious from which his vow springs.

Now we should like to find more knowledge and a

higher vision in a leader of Israel. We would fain escape from the conclusion that a Hebrew could be so ignorant of the divine character as Jephthah appears; and moved by such feelings many have taken a very different view of the matter. The Gileadite has, for example, been represented as fully aware of the Mosaic regulations concerning sacrifice and the method for redeeming the life of a firstborn child; that is to say he is supposed to have made his vow under cover of the Levitical provision by which in case his daughter should first meet him he would escape the necessity of sacrificing her. The rule in question could not, however, be stretched to a case like this. But, supposing it could, is it likely that a man whose whole soul had gone out in a vow of life and death to God would reserve such a door of escape? In that case the story would lose its terror indeed, but also its power: human history would be the poorer by one of the great tragic experiences wild and supernatural that show man struggling with thoughts above himself.

What did the Gileadite know? What ought he to have known? We see in his vow a fatalistic strain; he leaves it to chance or fate to determine who shall meet him. There is also an assumption of the right to take into his own hands the disposal of a human life; and this, though most confidently claimed, was entirely a factitious right. It is one which mankind has ceased to allow. Further the purpose of offering a human being in sacrifice is unspeakably horrible to us. But how differently these things must have appeared in the dim light which alone guided this man of lawless life in his attempt to make sure of God and honour Him! We have but to consider things that are done at the present day in the name of religion, the lifelong

"devotion" of young women in a nunnery, for example, and all the ceremonies which accompany that outrage on the divine order to see that centuries of Christianity have not yet put an end to practices which under colour of piety are barbaric and revolting. In the modern case a nun secluded from the world, dead to the world, is considered to be an offering to God. The old conception of sacrifice was that the life must pass out of the world by way of death in order to become God's. Or again, when the priest describing the devotion of his body says: "The essential, the sacerdotal purpose to which it should be used is to die. Such death must be begun in chastity, continued in mortification, consummated in that actual death which is the priest's final oblation, his last sacrifice,"*—the same superstition appears in a refined and mystical form.

His vow made, the chief went forth to battle leaving in his home one child only, a daughter beautiful, high-spirited, the joy of her father's heart. She was a true Hebrew girl and all her thought was that he, her sire, should deliver Israel. For this she longed and prayed. And it was so. The enthusiasm of Jephthah's devotion to God was caught by his troops and bore them on irresistibly. Marching from Mizpah in the land of Bashan they crossed Manasseh, and south from Mizpeh of Gilead, which was not far from the Jabbok, they found the Ammonites encamped. The first battle practically decided the campaign. From Aroer to Minnith, from the Jabbok to the springs of Arnon, the course of flight and bloodshed extended, until the invaders were swept from the territory of the tribes. Then came the triumphant return.

* Henri Perreyve.

We imagine the chief as he approached his home among the hills of Gilead, his eagerness and exultation mingled with some vague alarm. The vow he has made cannot but weigh upon his mind now that the performance of it comes so near. He has had time to think what it implies. When he uttered the words that involved a life the issue of war appeared doubtful. Perhaps the campaign would be long and indecisive. He might have returned not altogether descredited, yet not triumphant. But he has succeeded beyond his expectation. There can be no doubt that the offering is due to Jehovah. Who then shall appear? The secret of his vow is hid in his own breast. To no man has he revealed his solemn promise; nor has he dared in any way to interfere with the course of events. As he passes up the valley with his attendants there is a stir in his rude castle. The tidings of his coming have preceded him and she, that dear girl who is the very apple of his eye, his daughter, his only child, having already rehearsed her part, goes forth eagerly to welcome him. She is clad in her gayest dress. Her eyes are bright with the keenest excitement. The timbrel her father once gave her, on which she has often played to delight him, is tuned to a chant of triumph. She dances as she passes from the gate. Her father, her father, chief and victor!

And he? A sudden horror checks his heart. He stands arrested, cold as stone, with eyes of strange dark trouble fixed upon the gay young figure that welcomes him to home and rest and fame. She flies to his arms, but they do not open to her. She looks at him, for he has never repulsed her—and why now? He puts forth his hands as if to thrust away a dreadful sight, and what does she hear? Amid the sobs of

a strong man's agony, "Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low . . . and thou art one of them that trouble me." To startled ears the truth is slowly told. She is vowed to the Lord in sacrifice. He cannot go back. Jehovah who gave the victory now claims the fulfilment of the oath.

We are dealing with the facts of life. For a time let us put aside the reflections that are so easy to make about rash vows and the iniquity of keeping them. Before this anguish of the loving heart, this awful issue of a sincere but superstitious devotion we stand in reverence. It is one of the supreme hours of humanity. Will the father not seek relief from his obligation? Will the daughter not rebel? Surely a sacrifice so awful will not be completed. Yet we remember Abraham and Isaac journeying together to Moriah, and how with the father's resignation of his great hope there must have gone the willingness of the son to face death if that last proof of piety and faith is required. We look at the father and daughter of a later date and find the same spirit of submission to what is regarded as the will of God. Is the thing horrible—too horrible to be dwelt upon? Are we inclined to say,

> ". . . 'Heaven heads the count of crimes
> With that wild oath?' She renders answer high,
> 'Not so; nor once alone, a thousand times
> I would be born and die.'"

It has been affirmed that "Jephthah's rash act, springing from a culpable ignorance of the character of God, directed by heathen superstition and cruelty poured an ingredient of extreme bitterness into his cup of joy and poisoned his whole life." Suffering indeed there must have been for both the actors in that pitiful

tragedy of devotion and ignorance, who knew not the God to Whom they offered the sacrifice. But it is one of the marks of rude erring man that he does take upon himself such burdens of pain in the service of the invisible Lord. A shallow scepticism entirely misreads the strange dark deeds often done for religion; yet one who has uttered many a foolish thing in the way of "explaining" piety can at last confess that the renouncing mortifying spirit is, with all its errors, one of man's noble and distinguishing qualities. To Jephthah, as to his heroic daughter, religion was another thing than it is to many, just because of their extraordinary renunciation. Very ignorant they were surely, but they were not so ignorant as those who make no great offering to God, who would not resign a single pleasure, nor deprive a son or daughter of a single comfort or delight, for the sake of religion and the higher life. To what purpose is this waste? said the disciples, when the pound of ointment of spikenard very costly was poured on the head of Jesus and the house was filled with the odour. To many now it seems waste to expend thought, time or money upon a sacred cause, much more to hazard or to give life itself. We see the evils of enthusiastic self-devotion to the work of God very clearly; its power we do not feel. We are saving life so diligently, many of us, that we may well fear to lose it irremediably. There is no strain and therefore no strength, no joy. A weary pessimism dogs our unfaith.

To Jephthah and his daughter the vow was sacred, irrevocable. The deliverance of Israel by so signal and complete a victory left no alternative. It would have been well if they had known God differently; yet better this darkly impressive issue which went to the

making of Hebrew faith and strength than easy unfruitful evasion of duty. We are shocked by the expenditure of fine feeling and heroism in upholding a false idea of God and obligation to Him; but are we outraged and distressed by the constant effort to escape from God which characterizes our age? And have we for our own part come yet to the right idea of self and its relations? Our century, beclouded on many points, is nowhere less informed than in matters of self-sacrifice; Christ's doctrine is still uncomprehended. Jephthah was wrong, for God did not need to be bribed to support a man who was bent on doing his duty. And many fail now to perceive that personal development and service of God are in the same line. Life is made for generosity not mortification, for giving in glad ministry not for giving up in hideous sacrifice. It is to be devoted to God by the free and holy use of body, mind and soul in the daily tasks which Providence appoints.

The wailing of Jephthah's daughter rings in our ears bearing with it the anguish of many a soul tormented in the name of that which is most sacred, tormented by mistakes concerning God, the awful theory that He is pleased with human suffering. The relics of that hideous Moloch-worship which polluted Jephthah's faith, not even yet purged away by the Spirit of Christ, continue and make religion an anxiety and life a kind of torture. I do not speak of that devotion of thought and time, eloquence and talent to some worthless cause which here and there amazes the student of history and human life,—the passionate ardour, for example, with which Flora Macdonald gave herself up to the service of a Stuart. But religion is made to demand sacrifices compared to which the offering of Jephthah's daughter

was easy. The imagination of women especially, fired by false representations of the death of Christ in which there was a clear divine assertion of self, while it is made to appear as complete suppression of self, bears many on in a hopeless and essentially immoral endeavour. Has God given us minds, feelings, right ambitions that we may crush them? Does He purify our desires and aspirations by the fire of His own Spirit and still require us to crush them? Are we to find our end in being nothing, absolutely nothing, devoid of will, of purpose, of personality? Is this what Christianity demands? Then our religion is but refined suicide, and the God who desires us to annihilate ourselves is but the Supreme Being of the Buddhists, if those may be said to have a god who regard the suppression of individuality as salvation.

Christ was made a sacrifice for us. Yes: He sacrificed everything except His own eternal life and power; He sacrificed ease and favour and immediate success for the manifestation of God. So He achieved the fulness of personal might and royalty. And every sacrifice His religion calls us to make is designed to secure that enlargement and fulness of spiritual individuality in the exercise of which we shall truly serve God and our fellows. Does God require sacrifice? Yes, unquestionably—the sacrifice which every reasonable being must make in order that the mind, the soul may be strong and free, sacrifice of the lower for the higher, sacrifice of pleasure for truth, of comfort for duty, of the life that is earthly and temporal for the life that is heavenly and eternal. And the distinction of Christianity is that it makes this sacrifice supremely reasonable because it reveals the higher life, the heavenly hope, the eternal rewards for which the sacrifice is to

be made, that it enables us in making it to feel ourselves united to Christ in a divine work which is to issue in the redemption of mankind.

There are not a few popularly accepted guides in religion who fatally misconceive the doctrine of sacrifice. They take man-made conditions for Divine opportunities and calls. Their arguments come home not to the selfish and overbearing, but to the unselfish and long-suffering members of society, and too often they are more anxious to praise renunciation—any kind of it, for any purpose, so it involve acute feeling—than to magnify truth and insist on righteousness. It is women chiefly these arguments affect, and the neglect of pure truth and justice with which women are charged is in no small degree the result of false moral and religious teaching. They are told that it is good to renounce and suffer even when at every step advantage is taken of their submission and untruth triumphs over generosity. They are urged to school themselves to humiliation and loss not because God appoints these but because human selfishness imposes them. The one clear and damning objection to the false doctrine of self-suppression is here: it makes sin. Those who yield where they should protest, who submit where they should argue and reprove, make a path for selfishness and injustice and increase evil instead of lessening it. They persuade themselves that they are bearing the cross after Christ; but what in effect are they doing? The missionary amongst ignorant heathen has to bear to the uttermost as Christ bore. But to give so-called Christians a power of oppression and exaction is to turn the principles of religion upside down and hasten the doom of those for whom the sacrifice is made. When we meddle with truth and righteousness even in

the name of piety we simply commit sacrilege, we range ourselves with the wrong and unreal; there is no foundation under our faith and no moral result of our endurance and self-denial. We are selling Christ not following Him.

XVIII.

SHIBBOLETHS.

JUDGES xii. 1-7.

WHILE Jephthah and his Gileadites were engaged in the struggle with Ammon jealous watch was kept over all their movements by the men of Ephraim. As the head tribe of the house of Joseph occupying the centre of Palestine Ephraim was suspicious of all attempts and still more of every success that threatened its pride and pre-eminence. We have seen Gideon in the hour of his victory challenged by this watchful tribe, and now a quarrel is made with Jephthah who has dared to win a battle without its help. What were the Gileadites that they should presume to elect a chief and form an army? Fugitives from Ephraim who had gathered in the shaggy forests of Bashan and among the cliffs of the Argob, mere adventurers in fact, what right had they to set up as the protectors of Israel? The Ephraimites found the position intolerable. The vigour and confidence of Gilead were insulting. If a check were not put on the energy of the new leader might he not cross the Jordan and establish a tyranny over the whole land? There was a call to arms, and a large force was soon marching against Jephthah's camp to demand satisfaction and submission.

The pretext that Jephthah had fought against

Ammon without asking the Ephraimites to join him was shallow enough. The invitation appears to have been given; and even without an invitation Ephraim might well have taken the field. But the savage threat, "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire," showed the temper of the leaders in this expedition. The menace was so violent that the Gileadites were roused at once and, fresh from their victory over Ammon, they were not long in humbling the pride of the great western clan.

One may well ask, Where is Ephraim's fear of God? Why has there been no consultation of the priests at Shiloh by the tribe under whose care the sanctuary is placed? The great Jewish commentary affirms that the priests were to blame, and we cannot but agree. If religious influences and arguments were not used to prevent the expedition against Gilead they should have been used. The servants of the oracle might have understood the duty of the tribes to each other and of the whole nation to God and done their utmost to avert civil war. Unhappily, however, professed interpreters of the divine will are too often forward in urging the claims of a tribe or favouring the arrogance of a class by which their own position is upheld. As on the former occasion when Ephraim interfered, so in this we scarcely go beyond what is probable in supposing that the priests declared it to be the duty of faithful Israelites to check the career of the eastern chief and so prevent his rude and ignorant religion from gaining dangerous popularity. Bishop Wordsworth has seen a fanciful resemblance between Jephthah's campaign against Ammon and the revival under the Wesleys and Whitefield which as a movement against ungodliness put to shame the sloth of the Church of England. He

has remarked on the scorn and disdain—and he might have used stronger terms—with which the established clergy assailed those who apart from them were successfully doing the work of God. This was an example of far more flagrant tribal jealousy than that of Ephraim and her priests; and have there not been cases of religious leaders urging retaliation upon enemies or calling for war in order to punish what was absurdly deemed an outrage on national honour? With facts of this kind in view we can easily believe that from Shiloh no word of peace, but on the other hand words of encouragement were heard when the chiefs of Ephraim began to hold councils of war and to gather their men for the expedition that was to make an end of Jephthah.

Let it be allowed that Ephraim, a strong tribe, the guardian of the ark of Jehovah, much better instructed than the Gileadites in the divine law, had a right to maintain its place. But the security of high position lies in high purpose and noble service; and an Ephraim ambitious of leading should have been forward on every occasion when the other tribes were in confusion and trouble. When a political party or a church claims to be first in regard for righteousness and national well-being it should not think of its own credit or continuance in power but of its duty in the war against injustice and ungodliness. The favour of the great, the admiration of the multitude should be nothing to either church or party. To rail at those who are more generous, more patriotic, more eager in the service of truth, to profess a fear of some ulterior design against the constitution or the faith, to turn all the force of influence and eloquence and even of slander and menace against the disliked neighbour instead of the real enemy, this is the nadir of baseness. There are

Ephraims still, strong tribes in the land, that are too much exercised in putting down claims, too little in finding principles of unity and forms of practical brotherhood. We see in this bit of history an example of the humiliation that sooner or later falls on the jealous and the arrogant; and every age is adding instances of a like kind.

Civil war, at all times lamentable, appears peculiarly so when the cause of it lies in haughtiness and distrust. We have found however that, beneath the surface, there may have been elements of division and ill-will serious enough to require this painful remedy. The campaign may have prevented a lasting rupture between the eastern and western tribes, a separation of the stream of Israel's religion and nationality into rival currents. It may also have arrested a tendency to ecclesiastical narrowness, which at this early stage would have done immense harm. It is quite true that Gilead was rude and uninstructed, as Galilee had the reputation of being in the time of our Lord. But the leading tribes or classes of a nation are not entitled to overbear the less enlightened, nor by attempts at tyranny to drive them into separation. Jephthah's victory had the effect of making Ephraim and the other western tribes understand that Gilead had to be reckoned with, whether for weal or woe, as an integral and important part of the body politic. In Scottish history, the despotic attempt to thrust Episcopacy on the nation was the cause of a distressing civil war; a people who would not fall in with the forms of religion that were in favour at head-quarters had to fight for liberty. Despised or esteemed they resolved to keep and use their rights, and the religion of the world owes a debt to the Covenanters. Then in our own times,

lament as we may the varied forms of antagonism to settled faith and government, that enmity of which communism and anarchism are the delirium, it would be simply disastrous to suppress it by sheer force even if the thing were possible. Surely those who are certain they have right on their side need not be arrogant. The overbearing temper is always a sign of hollow principle as well as of moral infirmity. Was any Gilead ever put down by a mere assertion of superiority, even on the field of battle? Let the truth be acknowledged that only in freedom lies the hope of progress in intelligence, in constitutional order and purity of faith. The great problems of national life and development can never be settled as Ephraim tried to settle the movement beyond Jordan. The idea of life expands and room must be left for its enlargement. The many lines of thought, of personal activity, of religious and social experiment leading to better ways or else proving by-and-by that the old are best—all these must have place in a free state. The threats of revolution that trouble nations would die away if this were clearly understood; and we read history in vain if we think that the old autocracies or aristocracies will ever approve themselves again, unless indeed they take far wiser and more Christian forms than they had in past ages. The thought of individual liberty once firmly rooted in the minds of men, there is no going back to the restraints that were possible before it was familiar. Government finds another basis and other duties. A new kind of order arises which attempts no suppression of any idea or sincere belief and allows all possible room for experiments in living. Unquestionably this altered condition of things increases the weight of moral responsibility. In ordering our own lives as well as in

regulating custom and law we need to exercise the most serious care, the most earnest thought. Life is not easier because it has greater breadth and freedom. Each is thrown back more upon conscience, has more to do for his fellow-men and for God.

We pass now to the end of the campaign and the scene at the fords of Jordan, when the Gileadites, avenging themselves on Ephraim, used the notable expedient of asking a certain word to be pronounced in order to distinguish friend from foe. To begin with, the slaughter was quite unnecessary. If bloodshed there had to be, that on the field of battle was certainly enough. The wholesale murder of the "fugitives of Ephraim," so called with reference to their own taunt, was a passionate and barbarous deed. Those who began the strife could not complain; but it was the leaders of the tribe who rushed on war, and now the rank and file must suffer. Had Ephraim triumphed the defeated Gileadites would have found no quarter; victorious they gave none. We may trust, however, that the number forty-two thousand represents the total strength of the army that was dispersed and not those left dead on the field.

The expedient used at the fords turned on a defect or peculiarity of speech. Shibboleth perhaps meant *stream*. Of each man who came to the stream of Jordan wishing to pass to the other side it was required that he should say *Shibboleth*. The Ephraimites tried but said *Sibboleth* instead, and so betraying their west-country birth they pronounced their own doom. The incident has become proverbial and the proverbial use of it is widely suggestive. First, however, we may note a more direct application.

Do we not at times observe how words used in common speech, phrases or turns of expression betray a man's upbringing or character, his strain of thought and desire? It is not necessary to lay traps for men, to put it to them how they think on this point or that in order to discover where they stand and what they are. Listen and you will hear sooner or later the *Sibboleth* that declares the son of Ephraim. In religious circles, for example, men are found who appear to be quite enthusiastic in the service of Christianity, eager for the success of the church, and yet on some occasion a word, an inflexion or turn of the voice will reveal to the attentive listener a constant worldliness of mind, a worship of self mingling with all they think and do. You notice that and you can prophesy what will come of it. In a few months or even weeks the show of interest will pass. There is not enough praise or deference to suit the egotist, he turns elsewhere to find the applause which he values above everything.

Again, there are words somewhat rude, somewhat coarse, which in carefully ordered speech a man may not use; but they fall from his lips in moments of unguarded freedom or excitement. The man does not speak "half in the language of Ashdod"; he particularly avoids it. Yet now and again a lapse into the Philistine dialect, a something muttered rather than spoken betrays the secret of his nature. It would be harsh to condemn any one as inherently bad on such evidence. The early habits, the sins of past years thus unveiled may be those against which he is fighting and praying. Yet, on the other hand, the hypocrisy of a life may terribly show itself in these little things; and every one will allow that in choosing our companions and friends we ought to be keenly alive to the slightest indications

of character. There are fords of Jordan to which we come unexpectedly, and without being censorious we are bound to observe those with whom we purpose to travel further.

Here, however, one of the most interesting and, for our time, most important points of application is to be found in the self-disclosure of writers—those who produce our newspapers, magazines, novels, and the like. Touching on religion and on morals certain of these writers contrive to keep on good terms with the kind of belief that is popular and pays. But now and again, despite efforts to the contrary, they come on the *Shibboleth* which they forget to pronounce aright. Some among them who really care nothing for Christianity and have no belief whatever in revealed religion, would yet pass for interpreters of religion and guides of conduct. Christian morality and worship they barely endure; but they cautiously adjust every phrase and reference so as to drive away no reader and offend no devout critic; that is, they aim at doing so; now and again they forget themselves. We catch a word, a touch of flippancy, a suggestion of licence, a covert sneer which goes too far by a hairsbreadth. The evil lies in this that they are teaching multitudes to say *Sibboleth* along with them. What they say is so pleasant, so deftly said, with such an air of respect for moral authority that suspicion is averted, the very elect are for a time deceived. Indeed we are almost driven to think that Christians not a few are quite ready to accept the unbelieving *Sibboleth* from sufficiently distinguished lips. A little more of this lubricity and there will have to be a new and resolute sifting at the fords. The propaganda is villainously active and without intelligent and vigorous opposition it will proceed

to further audacity. It is not a few but scores of this sect who have the ear of the public and even in religious publications are allowed to convey hints of earthliness and atheism. A covert worship of Mammon and of Venus goes on in the temple professedly dedicated to Christ, and one cannot be sure that a seemingly pious work will not vend some doctrine of devils. It is time for a slaughter in God's name of many a false reputation.

But there are *Shibboleths* of party, and we must be careful lest in trying others we use some catchword of our own Gilead by which to judge their religion or their virtue. The danger of the earnest, alike in religion, politics and philanthropy, is to make their own favourite plans or doctrines the test of all worth and belief. Within our churches and in the ranks of social reformers distinctions are made where there should be none and old strifes are deepened. There are of course certain great principles of judgment. Christianity is founded on historical fact and revealed truth. "Every spirit which confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." In such a saying lies a test which is no tribal *Shibboleth*. And on the same level are others by which we are constrained at all hazards to try ourselves and those who speak and write. Certain points of morality are vital and must be pressed. When a writer says, "In mediæval times the recognition that every natural impulse in a healthy and mature being has a claim to gratification was a victory of unsophisticated nature over the asceticism of Christianity"—we use no Shibboleth-test in condemning him. He is judged and found wanting by principles on which the very existence

of human society depends. It is in no spirit of bigotry but in faithfulness to the essentials of life and the hope of mankind that the sternest denunciation is hurled at such a man. In plain terms he is an enemy of the race.

Passing from cases like this, observe others in which a measure of dogmatism must be allowed to the ardent. Where there are no strong opinions strenuously held and expressed little impression will be made. The prophets in every age have spoken dogmatically; and vehemence of speech is not to be denied to the temperance reformer, the apostle of purity, the enemy of luxurious self-indulgence and cant. Moral indignation must express itself strongly; and in the dearth of moral conviction we can bear with those who would even drag us to the ford and make us utter their *Shibboleth*. They go too far, people say: perhaps they do; but there are so many who will not move at all except in the way of pleasure.

Now all this is clear. But we must return to the danger of making one aspect of morality the sole test of morals, one religious idea the sole test of religion and so framing a formula by which men separate themselves from their friends and pass narrow bitter judgments on their kinsfolk. Let sincere belief and strong feeling rise to the prophetic strain; let there be ardour, let there be dogmatism and vehemence. But beyond urgent words and strenuous example, beyond the effort to persuade and convert there lie arrogance and the usurpation of a judgment which belongs to God alone. In proportion as a Christian is living the life of Christ he will repel the claim of any other man however devout to force his opinion or his action. All attempts at terrorism betray a lack of spirituality. The

Inquisition was in reality the world oppressing spiritual life. And so in less degree, with less truculence, the unspiritual element may show itself even in company with a fervent desire to serve the gospel. There need be no surprise that attempts to dictate to Christendom or any part of Christendom are warmly resented by those who know that religion and liberty cannot be separated. The true church of Christ has a firm grasp of what it believes and is aiming at, and by its resoluteness it bears on human society. It is also gracious and persuasive, reasonable and open, and so gathers men into a free and frank brotherhood, revealing to them the loftiest duty, leading them towards it in the way of liberty. Let men who understand this try each other and it will never be by limited and suspicious formulæ.

Amidst pedants, critics, hot and bitter partisans, we see Christ moving in divine freedom. Fine is the subtlety of His thought in which the ideas of spiritual liberty and of duty blend to form one luminous strain. Fine are the clearness and simplicity of that daily life in which He becomes the way and the truth to men. It is the ideal life, beyond all mere rules, disclosing the law of the kingdom of heaven; it is free and powerful because upheld by the purpose that underlies all activity and development. Are we endeavouring to realize it? Scarcely at all: the bonds are multiplying not falling away; no man is bold to claim his right, nor generous to give others their room. In this age of Christ we seem neither to behold nor desire His manhood. Shall this always be? Shall there not arise a race fit for liberty because obedient, ardent, true? Shall we not come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect

man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ?

For a little we must return to Jephthah, who after his great victory and his strange dark act of faith judged Israel but six years. He appears in striking contrast to other chiefs of his time and even of far later times in the purity of his home life, the more notable that his father set no example of good. Perhaps the legacy of dispeace and exile bequeathed to him with a tainted birth had taught the Gileadite, rude mountaineer as he was, the value of that order which his people too often despised. The silence of the history which is elsewhere careful to speak of wives and children sets Jephthah before us as a kind of puritan, with another and perhaps greater distinction than the desire to avoid war. The yearly lament for his daughter kept alive the memory not only of the heroine but of one judge in Israel who set a high example of family life. A sad and lonely man he went those few years of his rule in Gilead, but we may be sure that the character and will of the Holy One became more clear to him after he had passed the dreadful hill of sacrifice. The story is of the old world, terrible; yet we have found in Jephthah a sublime sincerity, and we may believe that such a man though he never repented of his vow would come to see that the God of Israel demanded another and a nobler sacrifice, that of life devoted to His righteousness and truth.

XIX.

THE ANGEL IN THE FIELD.

JUDGES xiii. 1-18.

IN our ignorance not in our knowledge, in our blindness not in our light we call nature secular and think of the ordinary course of events as a series of cold operations, governed by law and force, having nothing to do with divine purpose and love. Oftentimes we think so, and suffer because we do not understand. It is a pitiful error. The natural could not exist, there could be neither substance nor order without the over-nature which is at once law and grace. Vitality, movement are not an efflorescence heralding decay—as to the atheist; they are not the activity of an evil spirit—as sometimes to confused and falsely instructed faith. They are the outward and visible action of God, the hem of the vesture on which we lay hold and feel Him. In the seen and temporal there is a constant presence maintaining order, giving purpose and end. Were it otherwise man could not live an hour; even in selfishness and vileness he is a creature of two worlds which yet are one, so closely are they interwoven. At every point natural and supernatural are blended, the higher shaping the development of the lower, accomplishing in and through the lower a great spiritual plan. This it is which gives depth and weight

to our experience, communicating the dignity of the greatest moral and spiritual issues to the meanest, darkest human life. Everywhere, always, man touches God though he know Him not.

No surprise, therefore, is excited by the modes of speech and thought we come upon as we read Scripture. The surprise would be in not coming upon them. If we found the inspired writers divorcing God from the world and thinking of "nature" as a dark chamber of sin and torture echoing with His curse, there would be no profit in studying this old volume. Then indeed we might turn from it in discontent and scorn, even as some cast it aside just because it is the revelation of God dwelling with men upon the earth.

But what do the writers of faith mean when they tell of divine messengers coming to peasants at labour in the fields, speaking to them of events common to the race—the birth of some child, the defeat of a rival tribe—as affairs of the spiritual even more than of the temporal region? The narratives simple yet daring which affirm the mingling of divine purpose and action with human life give us the deepest science, the one real philosophy. Why do we have to care and suffer for each other? What are our sin and sorrow? These are not material facts; they are of quite another range. Always man is more than dust, better or worse than clay. Human lives are linked together in a gracious and awful order the course of which is now clearly marked, now obscurely traceable; and if it were in our power to revive the history of past ages, to mark the operation of faith and unbelief among men, issuing in virtue and nobleness on the one hand, in vice and lethargy on the other, we should see how near heaven is to earth, how rational a thing is prophecy, not only

as relating to masses of men but to particular lives. It is our stupidity not our wisdom that starts back from revelations of the over-world as if they confused what would otherwise be clear.

In more than one story of the Bible the motherhood of a simple peasant woman is a cause of divine communications and supernatural hopes. Is this amazing, incredible? What then is motherhood itself? In the coming and care of frail existences, the strange blending in one great necessity of the glad and the severe, the honourable and the humiliating, with so many possibilities of failure in duty, of error and misunderstanding ere the needful task is finished, death ever waiting on life, and agony on joy—in all this do we not find such a manifestation of the higher purpose as might well be heralded by words and signs? Only the order of God and His redemption can explain this "nature." Right in the path of atheistic reasoners, and of others not atheists, lie facts of human life which on their theory of naturalism are simply confounding, too great at once for the causes they admit and the ends they foresee. And if reason denies the possibility of prediction relating to these facts we need not wonder. Without philosophy or faith the range of denial is unlimited.

From the quaint and simple narrative before us the imaginative rationalist turns away with the one word —"myth." His criticism is of a sort which for all its ease and freedom gives the world nothing. We desire to know why the human mind harbours thoughts of the kind, why it has ideas of God and of a supernatural order, and how these work in developing the race. Have they been of service? Have they given strength and largeness to poor rude lives and so proved a great

reality? If so, the word myth is inadmissible. It sets falsehood at the source of progress and of good.

Here are two Hebrew peasants, in a period of Philistine domination more than a thousand years before the Christian era. Of their condition we know only what a few brief sentences can tell in a history concerned chiefly with the facts of a divine order in which men's lives have an appointed place and use. It is certain that a thorough knowledge of this Danite family, its own history and its part in the history of Israel, would leave no difficulty for faith. Belief in the fore-ordination of all human existence and the constant presence of God with men and women in their endurance, their hope and yearning would be forced upon the most sceptical mind. The insignificance of the occasion marked by a prediction given in the name of God may astonish some. But what is insignificant? Wherever divine predestination and authority extend, and that is throughout the whole universe, nothing can properly be called insignificant. The laws according to which material things and forces are controlled by God touch the minutest particles of matter, determine the shape of a dew-drop as certainly as the form of a world. At every point in human life, the birth of a child in the poorest cottage as well as of the heir to an empire, the same principles of heredity, the same disposition of affairs to leave room for that life and to work out its destiny underlie the economy of the world.

A life is to appear. It is not an interposition or interpolation. No event, no life is ever thrust into an age without relation to the past; no purpose is formed in the hour of a certain prophecy. For Samson as for every actor distinguished or obscure upon the stage of

the world the stars and the seasons have co-operated and all that has been done under the sun has gone to make a place for him. One who knows this can speak strongly and clearly. One who knows what hinders and what is sure to aid the fulfilment of a great destiny can counsel wisely. And so the angel of Jehovah, a messenger of the spiritual covenant, is no mere vehicle of a prediction he does not understand. Without hesitation he speaks to the woman in the field of what her son shall do. By the story of God's dealings with Israel, by the experiences of tribe and family and individual soul since the primitive age, by the simple faith of these parents that are to be and the honest energy of their humble lives he is prepared to announce to them their honour and their duty. "Thou shalt bear a son and he shall begin to deliver Israel." The messenger has had his preparation of thought, inquiry deep devout and pondering, ere he became fit to announce the word of God. No seer serves the age to which he is sent with that which costs him nothing, and here as elsewhere the law of all ministry to God and man must apply to the preparation and work of the revealer.

The personality of the messenger was carefully concealed. "A man of God whose countenance was like that of an angel of God very terrible"—so runs the pathetic, suggestive description; but the hour was too intense for mere curiosity. The honest mind does not ask the name and social standing of a messenger but only—Does he speak God's truth? Does he open life? There are few perhaps, to-day, who are simple and intelligent enough for this; few, therefore, to whom divine messages come. It is the credentials we are anxious about, and the prophet waits unheard while people are demanding his family and tribe, his college

and reputation. Are these satisfactory? Then they will listen. But let no prophet come to them unnamed. Yet of all importance to us as to Manoah and his wife are the message, the revelation, the announcement of privilege and duty. Where that divine order is disclosed which lies too deep for our own discovery but once revealed stirs and kindles our nature, the prophet needs no certification.

The child that was to be born, a gift of God, a divine charge, was promised to these parents. And in the case of every child born into the world there is a divine predestination which whether it has been recognized by the parents or not gives dignity to his existence from the first. There are natural laws and spiritual laws, the gathering together of energies and needs and duties which make the life unique, the care of it sacred. It is a new force in the world—a new vessel, frail as yet, launched on the sea of time. In it some stores of the divine goodness, some treasures of heavenly force are embarked. As it holds its way across the ocean in sunshine or shadow, this life will be watched by the divine eye, breathed gently upon by the summer airs or buffeted by the storms of God. Does heaven mind the children? "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father."

In the marvellous ordering of divine providence nothing is more calculated than fatherhood and motherhood to lift human life into the high ranges of experience and feeling. Apart from any special message or revelation, assuming only an ordinary measure of thoughtfulness and interest in the unfolding of life, there is here a new dignity the sense of which connects the task of those who have it with the creative energy of God. Everywhere throughout the world we can

trace a more or less clear understanding of this. The tide of life is felt to rise as the new office, the new responsibility are grasped. The mother is become—

> "A link among the days to knit
> The generations each to each."

The father has a sacred trust, a new and nobler duty to which his manhood is entirely pledged in the sight of that great God who is the Father of all spirits, doubly and trebly pledged to truth and purity and courage. It is the coronation of life; and the child, drawing father and mother to itself, is rightly the object of keenest interest and most assiduous care.

The interest lies greatly in this, that to the father and mother first, then to the world there may be untold possibilities of good in the existence which has begun. Apart from any prophecy like that given regarding Samson we have truly what may be called a special promise from God in the dawning energy of every child-life. By the cradle surely, if anywhere, hope sacred and heavenly may be indulged. With what earnest glances will the young eyes look by-and-by from face to face. With what new and keen love will the child-heart beat. Enlarging its grasp from year to year the mind will lay hold on duty and the will address itself to the tasks of existence. This child will be a heroine of home, a helper of society, a soldier of the truth, a servant of God. Does the mother dream long dreams as she bends over the cradle? Does the father, one indeed amongst millions, yet with his special distinction and calling, imagine for the child a future better than his own? It is well. By the highest laws and instincts of our humanity it is right and good. Here men and women, the rudest and

least taught, live in the immaterial world of love, faith, duty.

We observe the anxiety of Manoah and his wife to learn the special method of training which should fit their child for his task. The father's prayer so soon as he heard of the divine annunciation was, "O Lord, let the man of God whom Thou didst send come again unto us and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born." Conscious of ignorance and inexperience, feeling the weight of responsibility, the parents desired to have authoritative direction in their duty, and their anxiety was the deeper because their child was to be a deliverer in Israel. In their home on the hillside, where the cottages of Zorah clustered overlooking the Philistine plain, they were frequently disturbed by the raiders who swept up the valley of Sorek from Ashdod and Ekron. They had often wondered when God would raise up a deliverer as of old, some Deborah or Gideon to end the galling oppression. Now the answer to many a prayer and hope was coming, and in their own home the hero was to be cradled. We cannot doubt that this made them feel the pressure of duty and the need of wisdom. Yet the prayer of Manoah was one which every father has need to present, though the circumstances of a child's birth have nothing out of the most ordinary course.

To each human mind are given powers which require special fostering, peculiarities of temperament and feeling which ought to be specially considered. One way will not serve in the upbringing of two children. Even the most approved method of the time, whether that of private tutelage or public instruction, may thwart individuality; and if the way be ignorant and rough the original faculty will at its very springing be dis-

torted. It is but the barest commonplace, yet with what frequency it needs to be urged that of all tasks in the world that of the guide and instructor of youth is hardest to do well, best worth doing, therefore most difficult. There is no need to deny that for the earliest years of a child's life the instincts of a loving faithful mother may be trusted to guide her efforts. Yet even in those first years tendencies declare themselves that require to be wisely checked or on the other hand wisely encouraged; and the wisdom does not come by instinct. A spiritual view of life, its limitations and possibilities, its high calling and heavenly destiny is absolutely necessary—that vision of the highest things which religion alone can give. The prophet comes and directs; yet the parents must be prophets too. "The child is not to be educated for the present—for this is done without our aid unceasingly and powerfully—but for the remote future and often in opposition to the immediate future. . . . The child must be armed against the close-pressing present with a counterbalancing weight of three powers against the three weaknesses of the will, of love and of religion. . . . The girl and the boy must learn that there is something in the ocean higher than its waves—namely, a Christ who calls upon them."[1] On the religious teaching especially which is given to children much depends, and those who guide them should often begin by searching and reconsidering their own beliefs. Many a promising life is marred because youth in its wonder and sincerity was taught no living faith in God, or was thrust into the mould of some narrow creed which had more in it of human bigotry than of divine reason and love.

[1] Richter, *Levana.*

"What shall be the ordering of the child?" is Manoah's prayer, and it is well if simply expressed. The child's way needs ordering. Circumstances must be understood that discipline may fit the young life for its part. In our own time this represents a serious difficulty. What to do with children, how to order their lives is the pressing question in thousands of homes. The scheme of education in favour shows little insight, little esteem for the individuality of children, which is of as much value in the case of the backward as of those who are lured and goaded into distinction. To broaden life, to give it many points of interest is well. Yet on the other hand how much depends on discipline, on limitation and concentration, the need of which we are apt to forget. Narrow and limited was the life of Israel when Samson was born into it. The boy had to be what the nation was, what Zorah was, what Manoah and his wife were. The limitations of the time held him and the secluded life of Dan knowing but one article of patriotic faith, hatred of the Philistines. Was there so much of restriction here as to make greatness impossible? Not so. To be an Israelite was to have a certain moral advantage and superiority. It was not a barren solidarity, a dry ground in which this new life was planted; the sprout grew out of a living tree; traditions, laws full of spiritual power made an environment for the Hebrew child. Through the limitations, fenced and guided by them, a soul might break forth to the upper air. It was not the narrowness of Israel nor of his own home and upbringing but the licence of Philistia that weakened the strong arm and darkened the eager soul of the young Danite. Are we now to be afraid of limitations, bent on giving to youth multiform experience and the freest possible access to the world?

Do we dream that strength will come as the stream of life is allowed to wander over a whole valley, turning hither and thither in a shallow and shifty bed? The natural parallel here will instruct us, for it is an image of the spiritual fact. Strength not breadth is the mark at which education should be directed. The intellectually and morally strong will find culture waiting them at every turn of the way and will know how to select, what to appropriate. In truth there must be first the moral power gained by concentration, otherwise all culture—art, science, literature, travel—proves but a Barmecide feast at which the soul starves.

The special method of training for the child Samson is described in the words, "He shall be a Nazirite unto God." The mother was to drink no strong drink nor eat any unclean thing. Her son was to be trained in the same rigid abstinence; and always the sense of obligation to Jehovah was to accompany the austerity. The hair neither cut nor shaven but allowed to grow in natural luxuriance was to be the sign of the separated life. For the hero that was to be, this ascetic purity, this sacrament of unshorn hair were the only things prescribed. Perhaps there was in the command a reference to the godless life of the Israelites, a protest against their self-indulgence and half-heathen freedom. One in the tribe of Dan would be clear of the sins of drunkenness and gluttony at least, and so far ready for spiritual work.

Now it is notable enough to find thus early in history the example of a rule which even yet is not half understood to be the best as well as the safest for the guidance of appetite and the development of bodily strength. The absurdities commonly accepted by mothers and by those who only desire some cover for the indulgence of

taste are here set aside. A hero is to be born, one who in physical vigour will distinguish himself above all, the Hercules of sacred history. His mother rigidly abstains, and he in his turn is to abstain from strong drink. The plainest dieting is to serve both her and him—the kind of food and drink on which Daniel and his companions throve in the Chaldean palace. Surely the lesson is plain. Those who desire to excel in feats of strength speak of their training. It embraces a vow like the Nazirites, wanting indeed the sacred purpose and therefore of no use in the development of character. But let a covenant be made with God, let simple food and drink be used under a sense of obligation to Him to keep the mind clear and the body clean, and soon with appetites better disciplined we should have a better and stronger race.

It is not of course to be supposed that there was nothing out of the common in Samson's bodily vigour. Restraint of unhealthy and injurious appetite was not the only cause to which his strength was due. Yet as the accompaniment of his giant energy the vow has great significance. And to young men who incline to glory in their strength, and all who care to be fit for the tasks of life the significance will be clear. As for the rest whose appetites master them, who must have this and that because they crave it, their weakness places them low as men, nowhere as examples and guides. One would as soon take the type of manly vigour from a paralytic as from one whose will is in subjection to the cravings of the flesh.

It soon becomes clear in the course of the history that while some forms of evil were fenced off by Naziritism others as perilous were not. The main part of the devotion lay in abstinence, and that is not

spiritual life. Here is one who from his birth set apart to God is trained in manly control of his appetites. The locks that wave in wild luxuriance about his neck are the sign of robust physical vigour as well as of consecration. But, strangely, his spiritual education is not cared for as we might expect. He is disciplined and yet undisciplined. He fears the Lord and yet fears Him not. He is an Israelite but not a true Israelite. Jehovah is to him a God who gives strength and courage and blessing in return for a certain measure of obedience. As the Holy God, the true God, the God of purity, Samson knows Him not, does not worship Him. Within a certain limited range he hears a divine voice saying, "Thou shalt not," and there he obeys. But beyond is a great region in which he reckons himself free. And what is the result? He is strong, brave, sunny in temper as his name implies. But a helper of society, a servant of divine religion, a man in the highest sense, one of God's free men Samson does not become.

So is it always. One kind of exercise, discipline, obedience, virtue will not suffice. We need to be temperate and also pure, we need to keep from self-indulgence but also from niggardliness if we are to be men. We have to think of the discipline of mind and soul as well as soundness of body. He is only half a man, however free from glaring faults and vices, who has not learned the unselfishness, the love, the ardour in holy and generous tasks which Christ imparts. To abstain is a negative thing; the positive should command us —the highest manhood, holy, aspiring, patient, divine.

XX.

SAMSON PLUNGING INTO LIFE.

JUDGES xiii. 24—xiv. 20.

OF all who move before us in the Book of Judges Samson is pre-eminently the popular hero. In rude giant strength and wild daring he stands alone against the enemies of Israel contemptuous of their power and their plots. It is just such a man who catches the public eye and lives in the traditions of a country. Most Hebrews of the time minded piety and culture as little as did the Norsemen when they first professed Christianity. Both races liked manliness and feats of daring and could pardon much to one who flung his enemies and theirs to the ground with god-like strength of arm, and in the narrative of Samson's exploits we trace this note of popular estimation. He is a singular hero of faith, quite akin to those half-converted half-savage chiefs of the north who thought the best they could do for God was to kill His enemies and bound themselves by fierce oaths in the name of Christ to hack and slaughter. For the separateness from others, the isolation which marked Samson's whole career the reasons are evident. His vow of Naziritism, for one thing, kept him apart. Others were their own men, he was Jehovah's. His radiant health and uncommon physical energy even in boyhood were

to himself and others the sign of a divine blessing which maintained his sense of consecration. While he looked on at the riot and drunkenness of the feasts of his people he felt a growing revulsion, nor was he pleased with other indications of their temper. The frequent raids of Philistines from their walled cities by the coast struck terror far and wide—up the valleys of Dan into the heart of Judah and Ephraim. Samson as he grew up marked the supineness of his people with wonder and disgust. If he did anything for them it was not because he honoured them but in fulfilment of his destiny. At the same time we must note that the hero though a man of wit was not wise. He did the most injudicious things. He had nothing in him of the diplomatist, not much of the leader of men. It was only now and again when the mood took him that he cared to exert himself. So he went his own way an admired hero, a lonely giant among smaller beings. Worst of all he was an easy prey to some kinds of temptation. Restrained on one side, he gave himself license on others; his strength was always undisciplined, and early in his career we can almost predict how it will end. He ventures into one snare after another. The time is sure to come when he will fall into a pit out of which there is no way of escape.

Of the early life of the great Danite judge there is no record save that he grew and the Lord blessed him. The parents whose home on the hill-side he filled with boisterous glee must have looked on the lad with something like awe—so different was he from others, so great were the hopes based on his future. Doubtless they did their best for him. The consecration of his life to God they deeply impressed on his mind and taught him as well as they could the worship of the

Unseen Jehovah in the sacrifice of lamb or kid at the altar, in prayers for protection and prosperity. But nothing is said of instruction in the righteousness, the purity, the mercifulness which the law of God required. Manoah and his wife seem to have made the mistake of thinking that outside the vow moral education and discipline would come naturally, so far as they were needed. There was great strictness on certain points and elsewhere such laxity that he must have soon become wilful and headstrong and somewhat of a terror to the father and mother. Lads of his own age would of course adore him; as their leader in every bold pastime he would command their deference and loyalty, and many a wild thing was done, we can fancy, at which the people of the valley laughed uneasily or shook their heads in dismay. He who afterwards tied the jackals' tails together and set firebrands between each pair to burn the Philistines' corn must have served an apprenticeship to that kind of savage sport. Hebrew or alien for miles round who roused the anger of Samson would soon learn how dangerous it was to provoke him. Yet a dash of generosity always took the edge from fiery temper and rash revenge, and the people of Dan, for their part, would allow much to one who was expected to bring deliverance to Israel. The wild and dangerous youth was the only champion they could see.

But even before manhood Samson had times of deeper feeling than people in general would have looked for. Boisterous hot-blooded impetuous natures grievously wanting in decorum and sagacity are not always superficial; and there were occasions when the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson. He felt the purpose of his vow, saw the serious work to which

his destiny was urging him, looked down on the plain of the Philistines with a kindling eye, spoke in strains that even rose to prophetic intensity. At Mahaneh-Dan, the camp of Dan, where the more resolute spirits of the tribe came together for military exercise or to repel some raid of the enemy, Samson began to speak of his purpose and to make schemes for Israel's liberation. Into these the fiery vehemence of the young man flowed, and the enthusiasm of his nature bore others along. Can we be wrong in supposing that in various ways, by plans often ill-considered he sought to harass the Philistines, and that failure as a leader in these left him somewhat discredited? Samson was just of that sanguine venturesome disposition which makes light of difficulties and is always courting defeat. It was easy for him with his immense bodily strength to break through where other men were entrapped. A frequent result of the frays into which he hurried must have been, we imagine, to make his own friends doubt him rather than to injure the enemy. At all events he became no commander like Gideon or Jephthah, and the men of Judah, if not of Dan, while they acknowledged his calling and his power, began to think of him as a dangerous champion.

So far we have the merest hints by which to go, but the narrative becomes more detailed when it approaches the time of Samson's marriage. A strange union it is for a hero of Israel. What made him think of going down among the Philistines for a wife? How can the sacred writer say that the thing was of the Lord? Let us try to understand the circumstances. Between the people of Zorah and the villagers of Timnah a few miles down the valley on the other side who, though Philistines, were presumably not of the fighting sort

there was a kind of enforced neighbourliness. They could not have lived at all unless they had been content, Philistines for their part, Hebrews for theirs, to let the general enmity sleep. Samson by observing certain precautions and keeping his Hebrew tongue quiet was safe enough in Timnah, an object of fear rather than himself in danger. At the same time there may have been a touch of bravado in his rambles to the Philistine settlement, and the young woman of whom he caught a passing glance, perhaps at the spring, had very likely all the more charm for him that she was of the strong hostile race. History as well as fiction supplies instances in which this fascination does its work, family feuds, oppositions of caste and religion directing the eye and the fancy instead of repelling. In his sudden wilful way Samson resolved, and his mind once made up no one in Zorah could induce him to alter it. "The thing was of the Lord; for he sought an occasion against the Philistines." Perhaps Samson thought the woman would be denied to him, a straight way to a quarrel. But more probably it is the outcome of the whole pitiful business that is in the mind of the historian. After the event he traces the hand of Providence.

As we pass with Samson and his parents down to Timnah we cannot but agree with Manoah in his objection, "Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren or among all my people that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines?" It was emphatically one of those cases in which liking should not have led. An impetuous man is not to be excused; much less those who claim to be exceedingly rational and yet go against reason because of what they call love—or, worse, apart from love. General

rules are with difficulty laid down in matters of this sort, and to deny the right of love would be the worst error of all. So far as our popular writers are concerned, we must allow that they wonderfully balance the claims of "arrangement" and honest affection, declaring strongly for the latter. But yet such a difference as between faith and idolatry, between piety and godlessness, is a barrier that only the blindest folly can overleap when marriage is in view. Daughters of the Philistines may be "most divinely fair," most graceful and plausible; men who worship Moloch or Mammon or nothing but themselves may have most persuasive tongues and a large share of this world's good. But to mate with these, whatever liking there may be, is an experiment too rash for venturing. In Christian society now, is there not much need to repeat old warnings and revive a sense of peril that seems to have decayed? The conscience of piously bred young people was alive once to the danger and sin of the unequal yoke. In the rush for position and means marriage is being made by both sexes, even in most religious circles, an instrument and opportunity of earthly ambition, and it must be said that foolish romance is less to be feared than this carefulness in which conscience and heart alike submit to the imperious cravings of sheer worldliness. Novels have much to answer for; yet they can make one claim—they have done something for simple humanity. We want more than nature, however. Christian teaching must be heard and the Christian conscience must be re-kindled. The hope of the world waits on that devout simplicity of life which exalts spiritual aims and spiritual comradeship and by its beauty shames all meaner choice. In marriage not only should heart go out to heart, but

mind to mind and soul to soul; and the spirit of one who knows Christ can never unite with a self-worshipper or a servant of mammon.

Returning to Samson's case, he would possibly have said that he wished an adventurous marriage, that to wed a Danite woman would have in it too little risk, would be too dull, too commonplace a business for him, that he wanted a plunge into new waters. It is in this way, one must believe, many decide the great affair. So far from thinking they put thought away; a liking seizes them and in they leap. Yet in the best considered marriage that can be made is there not quite enough of adventure for any sane man or woman? Always there remain points of character unknown, unsuspected, possibilities of sickness, trouble, privation that fill the future with uncertainty, so far as human vision goes. It is, in truth, a serious undertaking for men and women, and to be entered upon only with the distinct assurance that divine providence clears the way and invites our advance. Yet again we are not to be suspicious of each other, probing every trait and habit to the quick. Marriage is the great example and expression of the trust which it is the glory of men and women to exercise and to deserve, the great symbol on earth of the confidences and unions of immortality. Matter of deep thankfulness it is that so many who begin the married life and end it on a low level, having scarcely a glimpse of the ideal, though they fail of much do not fail of all, but in some patience, some courage and fidelity show that God has not left them to nature and to earth. And happy are they who adventure together on no way of worldly policy or desire but in the pure love and heavenly faith which link their lives for ever in binding them to God.

Samson, reasoned with by his parents, waved their objection royally aside and ordered them to aid his design. It was necessary according to the custom of the country that they should conduct the negotiations for the marriage, and his wilfulness imposed on them a task that went against their consciences. So they found themselves with the common reward of worshipping parents. They had toiled for him, made much of him, boasted about him no doubt; and now their boy-god turns round and commands them in a thing they cannot believe to be right. They must choose between Jehovah and Samson and they have to give up Jehovah and serve their own lad. So David's pride in Absalom ended with the rebellion that drove the aged father from Jerusalem and exposed him to the contempt of Israel. It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth, the yoke even of parents who are not so wise as they might be and do not command much reverence. The order of family life among us, involving no absolute bondage, is recognized as a wholesome discipline by all who attain to any understanding of life. In Israel, as we know, filial respect and obedience were virtues sacredly commended, and it is one mark of Samson's ill-regulated self-esteeming disposition that he neglected the obvious duty of deference to the judgment of his parents.

On the way to Timnah the young man had an adventure which was to play an important part in his life. Turning aside out of the road he found himself suddenly confronted by a lion which, doubtless as much surprised as he was by the encounter, roared against him. The moment was not without its peril; but Samson was equal to the emergency and springing on the beast "rent it as he would have rent a kid.

The affair however did not seem worth referring to when he joined his parents, and they went on their way. It was as when a man of strong moral principle and force meets a temptation dangerous to the weak, to him an enemy easily overcome. His vigorous truth or honour or chastity makes short work of it. He lays hold of it and in a moment it is torn in pieces. The great talk made about temptations, the ready excuses many find for themselves when they yield are signs of a feebleness of will which in other ranges of life the same persons would be ashamed to own. It is to be feared that we often encourage moral weakness and unfaithfulness to duty by exaggerating the force of evil influences. Why should it be reckoned a feat to be honest, to be generous, to swear to one's own hurt? Under the dispensation of the Spirit of God, with Christ as our guide and stay every one of us should act boldly in the encounter with the lions of temptation. Tenderness to the weak is a Christian duty, but there is danger that young and old alike, hearing much of the seductions of sin, little of the ready help of the Almighty, submit easily where they should conquer and reckon on divine forbearance when they ought to expect reproach and contempt. Our generation needs to hear the words of St. Paul: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able." Is there a tremendous pressure constantly urging us towards that which is evil? In our large cities especially is the power of iniquity almost despotic? True enough. Yet men and women should be braced and strengthened by insistence on the other side. In Christian lands at least it is unquestionable that for every enticement to evil there

is a stronger allurement to good, that against every argument for immorality ten are set more potent in behalf of virtue, that where sin abounds grace does much more abound. Young persons are indeed tempted; but nothing will be gained by speaking to them or about them as if they were children incapable of decision, of whom it can only be expected that they will fail. By the Spirit of God, indeed, all moral victories are gained; the natural virtue of the best is uncertain and cannot be trusted in the trying hour, and he only who has a full inward life and earnest Christian purpose is ready for the test. But the Spirit of God is given. His sustaining, purifying, strengthening power is with us. We do not breathe deep, and then we complain that our hearts cease to beat with holy courage and resolve.

At Timnah, where life was perhaps freer than in a Hebrew town, Samson appears to have seen the woman who had caught his fancy; and he now found her, Philistine as she was, quite to his mind. It must have been by a low standard he judged, and many possible topics of conversation must have been carefully avoided. Under the circumstances, indeed, the difficulty of understanding each other's language may have been their safety. Certainly one who professed to be a fearer of God, a patriotic Israelite had to shut his eyes to many facts or thrust them from sight when he determined to wed this daughter of the enemy. But when we choose we can do much in the way of keeping things out of view which we do not wish to see. Persons who are at daggers drawn on fifty points show the greatest possible affability when it is their interest to be at one. Love gets over difficulties and so does policy. Occasions are found when the anxiously

orthodox can join in some comfortable compact with the agnostic, and the vehement state-churchman with the avowed secularist and revolutionary. And it seems to be only when two are nearly of the same creed, with just some hairsbreadth of divergence on a few articles of belief, that the obstacles to happy union are apt to become insurmountable. Then every word is watched, each tone noted with suspicion. It is not between Hebrew and Philistine but between Ephraim and Judah that alliances are difficult to form. We hope for the time when the long and bitter disputes of Christendom shall be overcome by love of truth and God. Yet first there must be an end to the strange reconcilings and unions which like Samson's marriage often confuse and obstruct the way of Christian people.

There is an interval of some months after the marriage has been arranged and the bridegroom is on his way once more down the valley to Timnah. As he passes the scene of his encounter with the lion he turns aside to see the carcase and finds that bees have made it their home. Vultures and ants have first found it and devoured the flesh, then the sun has thoroughly dried the skin and in the hollow of the ribs the bees have settled. At considerable risk Samson possesses himself of some of the combs and goes on eating the honey, giving a portion also to his father and mother. It is again a type, and this time of the sweetness to be found in the recollection of virtuous energy and overcoming. Not that we are to be always dwelling on our faithfulness even for the purpose of thanking God Who gave us moral strength. But when circumstances recall a trial and victory it is surely matter of proper joy to remember that here we were strong enough to be true, and there to be honest and pure when the odds

seemed to be against us. The memories of a good man or good woman are sweeter than the honeycomb, though tempered often by sorrow over the human instruments of evil who had to be struggled with and thrust aside in the sharp conflict with sin and wrong. Very few in youth or middle-life seem to think of this joy, which makes beautiful many a worn and aged face on earth and will not be the least element in the felicity of heaven. Too often we bear burdens because we must; we are dragged through trial and distress to comparative quiet; we do not comprehend what is at stake, what we may do and gain, what we are kept from losing; and so the look across our past has none of the glow of triumph, little of the joy of harvest. For man's blessedness is not to be separated from personal striving. In fidelity he must sow that he may reap in strength, in courage that he may reap in gladness. He is made not for mere success, not for mere safety, but for overcoming.

We are not finished with the lion; he next appears covertly, in a riddle. Samson has shown himself a strong man; now we hear him speak and he proves a wit. It is the wedding festival, and thirty young men have been gathered—to honour the bridegroom, shall we say?—or to watch him? Perhaps from the first there has been suspicion in the Philistine mind, and it seems necessary to have as many as thirty to one in order to overawe Samson. In the course of the feast there might be quarrels, and without a strong guard on the Hebrew youth Timnah might be in danger. As the days went by the company fell to proposing riddles and Samson, probably annoyed by the Philistines who watched every movement, gave them his, on terms quite fair, yet leaving more than a loophole for discontent

and strife. In the conditions we see the man perfectly self-reliant, full of easy superiority, courting danger and defying envy. The thirty may win—if they can. In that case he knows how he will pay the forfeit. "Put forth thy riddle," they said, "that we may hear it;" and the strong mellow Hebrew voice chanted the puzzling verse:

> "Out of the eater came forth meat;
> Out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Now in itself this is simply a curiosity of old-world table-talk. It is preserved here mainly because of its bearing on following events; and certainly the statement which has been made that it contained a gospel for the Philistines is one we cannot endorse. Yet like many witty sayings the riddle has a range of meaning far wider than Samson intended. Adverse influences conquered, temptation mastered, difficulties overcome, the struggle of faithfulness will supply us not only with happy recollections but also with arguments against infidelity, with questions that confound the unbeliever. One who can glory in tribulations that have brought experience and hope, in bonds and imprisonments that have issued in a keener sense of liberty, who having nothing yet possesses all things—such a man questioning the denier of divine providence cannot be answered. Invigoration has come out of that which threatened life and joy out of that which made for sorrow. The man who is in covenant with God is helped by nature; its forces serve him; he is fed with honey from the rock and with the finest of the wheat. When out of the mire of trouble and the deep waters of despondency he comes forth braver, more hopeful, strongly confident in the love of God,

sure of the eternal foundation of life, what can be said in denial of the power that has filled him with strength and peace? Here is an argument that can be used by every Christian, and ought to be in every Christian's hand. Out of his personal experience each should be able to state problems and put inquiries unanswerable by unbelief. For unless there is a living God Whose favour is life, Whose fellowship inspires and ennobles the soul, the strength which has come through weakness, the hope that sprang up in the depth of sorrow cannot be accounted for. There are natural sequences in which no mystery lies. When one who has been defamed and injured turns on his enemy and pursues him in revenge, when one who has been defeated sinks back in languor and waits in pitiful inaction for death, these are results easily traced to their cause. But the man of faith bears witness to sequences of a different kind. His fellows have persecuted him, and he cares for them still. Death has bereaved him, and he can smile in its face. Afflictions have been multiplied and he glories in them. The darkness has fallen and he rejoices more than in the noontide of prosperity. Out of the eater has come forth meat, out of the strong has come forth sweetness. "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The paradox of the life of Christ thus stated by Himself is the supreme instance of that demonstration of divine power which the history of every Christian should clearly and constantly support.

XXI.

DAUNTLESS IN BATTLE, IGNORANTLY BRAVE.

Judges xv.

GIVEN a man of strong passions and uninstructed conscience, wild courage and giant energy, with the sense of a mission which he has to accomplish against his country's enemies so that he reckons himself justified in doing them injury or killing them in the name of God, and you have, no complete hero, but a real and interesting man. Such a character, however, does not command our admiration. The enthusiasm we feel in tracing the career of Deborah or Gideon fails us in reviewing these stories of revenge in which the Hebrew champion appears as cruel and reckless as an uncircumcised Philistine. When we see Samson leaving the feast by which his marriage has been celebrated and marching down to Ashkelon where in cold blood he puts thirty men to death for the sake of their clothing, when we see a country-side ablaze with the standing corn which he has kindled, we are as indignant with him as with the Philistines when they burn his wife and her father with fire. Nor can we find anything like excuse for Samson on the ground of zeal in the service of pure religion. Had he been a fanatical Hebrew mad against idolatry his conduct might find some apology; but no such clue offers.

The Danite is moved chiefly by selfish and vain passions, and his sense of official duty is all too weak and vague. We see little patriotism and not a trace of religious fervour. He is serving a great purpose with some sincerity, but not wisely, not generously nor greatly. Samson is a creature of impulse working out his life in blind almost animal fashion, perceiving the next thing that is to be done not in the light of religion or duty, but of opportunity and revenge. The first of his acts against the Philistines was no promising start in a heroic career, and almost at every point in the story of his life there is something that takes away our respect and sympathy. But the life is full of moral suggestion and warning. He is a real and striking example of the wild Berserker type.

1. For one thing this stands out as a clear principle that a man has his life to live, his work to do, alone if others will not help, imperfectly if not in the best fashion, half-wrongly if the right cannot be clearly seen. This world is not for sleep, is not for inaction and sloth. "Whatsoever thy hand finds to do, do it with thy might." A thousand men in Dan, ten thousand in Judah did nothing that became men, sat at home while their grapes and olives grew, abjectly sowed and reaped their fields in dread of the Philistines, making no attempt to free their country from the hated yoke. Samson, not knowing rightly how to act, did go to work and, at any rate, lived. Among the dull spiritless Israelites of the day, three thousand of whom actually came on one occasion to beseech him to give himself up and bound him with ropes that he might be safely passed over to the enemy, Samson with all his faults looks like a man. Those men of Dan and Judah would slay the Philistines if they dared. It is not because

they are better than Samson that they do not go down to Ashkelon and kill. Their consciences do not keep them back; it is their cowardice. One who with some vision of a duty owing to his people goes forth and acts, contrasts well with these chicken-hearted thousands.

We are not at present stating the complete motive of human activity nor setting forth the ideal of life. To that we shall come afterwards. But before you can have ideal action you must have action. Before you can have life of a fine and noble type you must have life. Here is an absolute primal necessity; and it is the key to both evolutions, the natural and the spiritual. First the human creature must find its power and capability and must use these to some end, be it even a wrong end, rather than none; after this the ideal is caught and proper moral activity becomes possible. We need not look for the full corn in the ear till the seed has sprouted and grown and sent its roots well into the soil. With this light the roll of Hebrew fame is cleared and we can trace freely the growth of life. The heroes are not perfect; they have perhaps barely caught the light of the ideal; but they have strength to will and to do, they have faith that this power is a divine gift, and they having it are God's pioneers.

The need is that men should in the first instance live so that they may be faithful to their calling. Deborah looking round beheld her country under the sore oppression of Jabin, saw the need and answered to it. Others only vegetated; she rose up in human stature resolute to live. That also was what Gideon began to do when at the divine call he demolished the altar on the height of Ophrah; and Jephthah fought and endured

by the same law. So soon as men begin to live there is hope of them.

Now the hindrances to life are these—first, slothfulness, the disposition to drift, to let things go; second, fear, the restriction imposed on effort of body or of mind by some opposing force ingloriously submitted to; third, ignoble dependence on others. The proper life of man is never reached by many because they are too indolent to win it. To forecast and devise, to try experiments, pushing out in this direction and that is too much for them. Some opportunity for doing more and better lies but a mile away or a few yards; they see but will not venture upon it. Their country is sinking under a despot or a weak and foolish government; they do nothing to avert ruin, things will last their time. Or again, their church is stirred with throbs of a new duty, a new and keen anxiety; but they refuse to feel any thrill, or feeling it a moment they repress the disturbing influence. They will not be troubled with moral and spiritual questions, calls to action that make life severe, high, heroic. Often this is due to want of physical or mental vigour. Men and women are overborne by the labour required of them, the weary tale of bricks. Even from youth they have had burdens to bear so heavy that hope is never kindled. But there are many who have no such excuse. Let us alone, they say, we have no appetite for exertion, for strife, for the duties that set life in a fever. The old ways suit us, we will go on as our fathers have gone. The tide of opportunity ebbs away and they are left stranded.

Next, and akin, there is fear, the mood of those who hear the calls of life but hear more clearly the threatenings of sense and time. Often it comes in the form of

a dread of change, apprehension as regards the unknown seas on which effort or thought would launch forth. Let us be still, say the prudent; better to bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of. Are we ground down by the Philistines? Better suffer than be killed. Are our laws unjust and oppressive? Better rest content than risk revolution and the upturning of everything. Are we not altogether sure of the basis of our belief? Better leave it unexamined than begin with inquiries the end of which cannot be foreseen. Besides, they argue, God means us to be content. Our lot in the world however hard is of His giving; the faith we hold is of His bestowing. Shall we not provoke Him to anger if we move in revolution or in inquiry. Still it is life they lose. A man who does not think about the truths he rests on has an impotent mind. One who does not feel it laid on him to go forward, to be brave, to make the world better has an impotent soul. Life is a constant reaching after the unattained for ourselves and for the world.

And lastly there is ignoble dependence on others. So many will not exert themselves because they wait for some one to come and lift them up. They do not think, nor do they understand that instruction brought to them is not life. No doubt it is the plan of God to help the many by the instrumentality of the few, a whole nation or world by one. Again and again we have seen this illustrated in Hebrew history, and elsewhere the fact constantly meets us. There is one Luther for Europe, one Cromwell for England, one Knox for Scotland, one Paul for early Christianity. But at the same time it is because life is wanting, because men have the deadly habit of dependence that the hero must be brave for them and the reformer must

break their bonds. The true law of life on all levels, from that of bodily effort upwards, is self-help; without it there is only an infancy of being. He who is in a pit must exert himself if he is to be delivered. He who is in spiritual darkness must come to the light if he is to be saved.

Now we see in Samson a man who in his degree lived. He had strength like the strength of ten; he had also the consecration of his vow and the sense of a divine constraint and mandate. These things urged him to life and made activity necessary to him. He might have reclined in careless ease like many around. But sloth did not hold him nor fear. He wanted no man's countenance nor help. He lived. His mere exertion of power was the sign of higher possibilities.

Live at all hazards, imperfectly if perfection is not attainable, half-wrongly if the right cannot be seen. Is this perilous advice? From one point of view it may seem very dangerous. For many are energetic in so imperfect a way, in so blundering and false a way that it might appear better for them to remain quiet, practically dead than degrade and darken the life of the race by their mistaken or immoral vehemence. You read of those traders among the islands of the Pacific who, afraid that their nefarious traffic should suffer if missionary work succeeded, urged the natives to kill the missionaries or drive them away, and when they had gained their end quickly appeared on the scene to exchange for the pillaged stores of the mission-house muskets and gunpowder and villainous strong drink. May it not be said that these traders were living out their lives as much as the devoted teachers who had risked everything for the sake of doing good? Napoleon I., when the scheme of empire presented itself to

him and all his energies were bent on climbing to the summit of affairs in France and in Europe—was not he living according to a conception of what was greatest and best? Would it not have been better if those traders and the ambitious Corsican alike had been content to vegetate—inert and harmless through their days? And there are multitudes of examples. The poet Byron for one—could the world not well spare even his finest verse to be rid of his unlawful energy in personal vice and in coarse profane word?

One has to confess the difficulty of the problem, the danger of praising mere vigour. Yet if there is risk on the one side the risk on the other is greater: and truth demands risk, defies peril. It is unquestionable that any family of men when it ceases to be enterprising and energetic is of no more use in the economy of things. Its land is a necropolis. The dead cannot praise God. The choice is between activity that takes many a wrong direction, hurrying men often towards perdition, yet at every point capable of redemption, and on the other hand inglorious death, that existence which has no prospect but to be swallowed up of the darkness. And while such is the common choice there is also this to be noted that inertness is not certainly purer than activity though it may appear so merely by contrast. The active life compels us to judge of it; the other a mere negation calls for no judgment, yet is in itself a moral want, an evil and injury. Conscience being unexercised decay and death rule all.

Men cannot be saved by their own effort and vigour. Most true. But if they make no attempt to advance towards strength, dominion and fulness of existence, they are the prey of force and evil. Nor will it suffice

that they simply exert themselves to keep body and soul together. The life is more than meat. We must toil not only that we may continue to subsist, but for personal distinctness and freedom. Where there are strong men, resolute minds, earnestness of some kind, there is soil in which spiritual seed may strike root. The dead tree can produce neither leaf nor flower. In short, if there is to be a human race at all for the divine glory it can only be in the divine way, by the laws that govern existence of every degree.

2. We come, however, to the compensating principle of responsibility—the law of Duty which stands over energy in the range of our life. No man, no race is justified by force or as we sometimes say by doing. It is faith that saves. Samson has the rude material of life; but though his action were far purer and nobler it could not make him a spiritual man: his heart is not purged of sin nor set on God.

Granted that the time was rough, chaotic, cloudy, that the idea of injuring the Philistines in every possible way was imposed on the Danite by his nation's abject state, that he had to take what means lay in his power for accomplishing the end. But possessed of energy he was deficient in conscience, and so failed of noble life. This may be said for him that he did not turn against the men of Judah who came to bind him and give him up. Within a certain range he understood his responsibility. But surely a higher life than he lived, better plans than he followed were possible to one who could have learned the will of God at Shiloh, who was bound to God by a vow of purity and had that constant reminder of the Holy Lord of Israel. It is no uncommon thing for men to content themselves with one sacrament, one observance which is reckoned

enough for salvation—honesty in business, abstinence from strong drink, attendance on church ordinances. This they do and keep the rest of existence for unrestrained self-pleasing, as though salvation lay in a restraint or a form. But whoever can think is bound to criticise life, to try his own life, to seek the way of salvation, and that means being true to the best he knows and can know, it means believing in the will of God. Something higher than his own impulse is to guide him. He is free, yet responsible. His activity, however great, has no real power, no vindication unless it falls in with the course of divine law and purpose. He lives by faith.

Generally there is one clear principle which, if a man held to it, would keep him right in the main. It may not be of a very high order, yet it will prepare the way for something better and meanwhile serve his need. And for Samson one simple law of duty was to keep clear of all private relations and entanglements with the Philistines. There was nothing to hinder him from seeing that to be safe and right as a rule of life. They were Israel's enemies and his own. He should have been free to act against them: and when he married a daughter of the race he forfeited as an honourable man the freedom he ought to have had as a son of Israel. Doubtless he did not understand fully the evil of idolatry nor the divine law that Hebrews were to keep themselves separate from the worshippers of false gods. Yet the instincts of the race to which he belonged, fidelity to his forefathers and compatriots made their claim upon him. There was a duty too which he owed to himself. As a brave strong man he was discredited by the line of action which he followed. His honour lay in being an open enemy to

the Philistines, his dishonour in making underhand excuses for attacking them. It was base to seek occasion against them when he married the woman at Timnah, and from one act of baseness he went on to others because of that first error. And chiefly Samson failed in his fidelity to God. Scarcely ever was the name of Jehovah dragged through the mire as it was by him. The God of truth, the divine guardian of faithfulness, the God who is light, in Whom is no darkness at all, was made by Samson's deeds to appear as the patron of murder and treachery. We can hardly allow that an Israelite was so ignorant of the ordinary laws of morality as to suppose that faith need not be kept with idolaters; there were traditions of his people which prevented such a notion. One who knew of Abraham's dealings with the Hittite Ephron and his rebuke in Egypt could not imagine that the Hebrew lay under no debt of human equity and honour to the Philistine. Are there men among ourselves who think no faithfulness is due by the civilised to the savage? Are there professed servants of Christ who dare to suggest that no faith need be kept with heretics? They reveal their own dishonour as men, their own falseness and meanness. The primal duty of intelligent and moral beings cannot be so dismissed. And even Samson should have been openly the Philistines' enemy or not at all. If they were cruel, rapacious, mean, he ought to have shown that Jehovah's servant was of a different stamp. We cannot believe morality to have been at so low an ebb among the Hebrews that the popular leader did not know better than he acted. He became a judge in Israel, and his judgeship would have been a pretence unless he had some of the justice, truth and honour which God demanded of men. Beginning

in a very mistaken way he must have risen to a higher conception of duty, otherwise his rule would have been a disaster to the tribes he governed.

Conscience has originated in fear and is to decay with ignorance, say some. Already that extraordinary piece of folly has been answered. Conscience is the correlative of power, the guide of energy. If the one decays, so must the other. Living strongly, energetically, making experiments, seeking liberty and dominion, pressing towards the higher we are ever to acknowledge the responsibility which governs life. By what we know of the divine will we are to order every purpose and scheme and advance to further knowledge. There are victories we might win, there are methods by which we might harass those who do us wrong. One voice says Snatch the victories, go down by night and injure the foe, insinuate what you cannot prove, while the sentinels sleep plunge your spear through the heart of a persecuting Saul. But another voice asks, Is this the way to assert moral life? Is this the line for a man to take? The true man swears to his own hurt, suffers and is strong, does in the face of day what he has it in him to do and, if he fails, dies a true man still. He is not responsible for obeying commands of which he is ignorant, nor for mistakes which he cannot avoid. One like Samson is clean-handed in what it would be unutterably base for us to do. But close beside every man are such guiding ideas as straightforwardness, sincerity, honesty. Each of us knows his duty so far and cannot deceive himself by supposing that God will excuse him in acting, even for what he counts a good end, as a cheat and a hypocrite. In politics the rule is as clear as in companionship, in war as in love.

It has not been asserted that Samson was without

a sense of responsibility. He had it, and kept his vow. He had it, and fought against the Philistines. He did some brave things openly and like a man. He had a vision of Israel's need and God's will. Had this not been true he could have done no good; the whole strength of the hero would have been wasted. But he came short of effecting what he might have effected just because he was not wise and serious. His strokes missed their aim. In truth Samson never went earnestly about the task of delivering Israel. In his fulness of power he was always half in sport, making random shots, indulging his own humour. And we may find in his career no inapt illustration of the careless way in which the conflict with the evils of our time is carried on. With all the rage for societies and organizations there is much haphazard activity, and the fanatic for rule has his contrast in the free-lance who hates the thought of responsibility. A curious charitableness too confuses the air. There are men who are full of ardour to-day and strike in with some hot scheme against social wrongs, and the next day are to be seen sitting at a feast with the very persons most to blame under some pretext of finding occasion against them or showing that there is "nothing personal." This perplexes the whole campaign. It is usually mere bravado rather than charity, a mischief not a virtue.

Israel must be firm and coherent if it is to win liberty from the Philistines. Christians must stand by each other steadily if they are to overcome infidelity and rescue the slaves of sin. The feats of a man who holds aloof from the church because he is not willing to be bound by its rules count for little in the great warfare of the age. Many there are among our literary men, politicians and even philanthropists who strike in now

and again in a Christian way and with unquestionably Christian purpose against the bad institutions and social evils of our time, but have no proper basis or aim of action and maintain towards Christian organizations and churches a constant attitude of criticism. Samson-like they make showy random attacks on "bigotry," "inconsistency" and the like. It is not they who will deliver man from hardness and worldliness of soul; not they who will bring in the reign of love and truth.

3. Looking at Samson's efforts during the first part of his career and observing the want of seriousness and wisdom that marred them, we may say that all he did was to make clear and deep the cleft between Philistines and Hebrews. When he appears on the scene there are signs of a dangerous intermixture of the two races, and his own marriage is one. The Hebrews were apparently inclined to settle down in partial subjection to the Philistines and make the best they could of the situation, hoping perhaps that by-and-by they might reach a state of comfortable alliance and equality. Samson may have intended to end that movement or he may not. But he certainly did much to end it. After the first series of his exploits, crowned by the slaughter at Lehi, there was an open rupture with the Philistines which had the best effect on Hebrew morals and religion. It was clear that one Israelite had to be reckoned with whose strong arm dealt deadly blows. The Philistines drew away in defeat. The Hebrews learned that they needed not to remain in any respect dependent or afraid. This kind of division grows into hatred; but, as things were, dislike was Israel's safety. The Philistines did harm as masters; as friends they would have done even more. Enmity meant revulsion from Dagon-worship and all the social customs of the opposed race. For this

the Hebrews were indebted to Samson; and although he was not himself true all along to the principle of separation, yet in his final act he emphasized it so by destroying the temple of Gaza that the lesson was driven home beyond the possibility of being forgotten.

It is no slight service those do who as critics of parties and churches show them clearly where they stand, who are to be reckoned as enemies, what alliances are perilous. There are many who are exceedingly easy in their beliefs, too ready to yield to the *Zeit Geist* that would obliterate definite belief and with it the vigour and hope of mankind. Alliance with Philistines is thought of as a good, not a risk, and the whole of a party or church may be so comfortably settling in the new breadth and freedom of this association that the certain end of it is not seen. Then is the time for the resolute stroke that divides party from party, creed from creed. A reconciler is the best helper of religion at one juncture; at another it is the Samson who standing alone perhaps, frowned on equally by the leaders and the multitude, makes occasion to kindle controversy and set sharp variance between this side and that. Luther struck in so. His great act was one that "rent Christendom in twain." Upon the Israel which looked on afraid or suspicious he forced the division which had been for centuries latent. Does not our age need a new divider? You set forth to testify against Philistines and soon find that half your acquaintances are on terms of the most cordial friendship with them, and that attacks upon them which have any point are reckoned too hot and eager to be tolerated in society. To the few who are resolute duty is made difficult and protest painful: the reformer has to bear the sins and even the scorn of many who should appear with him.

XXII.

PLEASURE AND PERIL IN GAZA.

JUDGES xvi. 1-3.

BY courage and energy Samson so distinguished himself in his own tribe and on the Philistine border that he was recognized as judge. Government of any kind was a boon, and he kept rude order, as much perhaps by overawing the restless enemy as by administering justice in Israel. Whether the period of twenty years assigned to Samson's judgeship intervened between the fight at Lehi and the visit to Gaza we cannot tell. The chronology is vague, as might be expected in a narrative based on popular tradition. Most likely the twenty years cover the whole time during which Samson was before the public as hero and acknowledged chief.

Samson went down to Gaza, which was the principal Philistine city situated near the Mediterranean coast some forty miles from Zorah. For what reason did he venture into that hostile place? It may, of course, have been that he desired to learn by personal inspection what was its strength, to consider whether it might be attacked with any hope of success; and if that was so we would be disposed to justify him. As the champion and judge of Israel he could not but feel the danger to which his people were constantly exposed

from the Philistine power so near to them and in those days always becoming more formidable. He had to a certain extent secured deliverance for his country as he was expected to do; but deliverance was far from complete, could not be complete till the strength of the enemy was broken. At great risk to himself he may have gone to play the spy and devise, if possible, some plan of attack. In this case he would be an example of those who with the best and purest motives, seeking to carry the war of truth and purity into the enemy's country, go down into the haunts of vice to see what men do and how best the evils that injure society may be overcome. There is risk in such adventure; but it is nobly undertaken, and even if we do not feel disposed to imitate we must admire. Bold servants of Christ may feel constrained to visit Gaza and learn for themselves what is done there. Beyond this too is a kind of adventure which the whole church justifies in proportion to its own faith and zeal. We see St. Paul and his companions in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Athens and other heathen towns, braving the perils which threaten them there, often attacked, sometimes in the jaws of death, heroic in the highest sense. And we see the modern missionary with like heroism landing on savage coasts and at the constant risk of life teaching the will of God in a sublime confidence that it shall awaken the most sunken nature; a confidence never at fault.

But we are obliged to doubt whether Samson had in view any scheme against the Philistine power; and we may be sure that he was on no mission for the good of Gaza. Of a patriotic or generous purpose there is no trace; the motive is unquestionably of a different kind. From his youth this man was restless, adventurous, ever

craving some new excitement good or bad. He could do anything but quietly pursue a path of duty; and in the small towns of Dan and the valleys of Judah he had little to excite and interest him. There life went on in a dull way from year to year, without gaiety, bustle, enterprise. Had the chief been deeply interested in religion, had he been a reformer of the right kind he would have found opportunity enough for exertion and a task into which he might have thrown all his force. There were heathen images to break in pieces, altars and high-places to demolish. To banish Baal-worship and the rites of Ashtoreth from the land, to bring the customs of the people under the law of Jehovah would have occupied him fully. But Samson did not incline to any such doings; he had no passion for reform. We never see in his life one such moment as Gideon and Jephthah knew of high religious daring. Dark hours he had, sombre enough, as at Lehi after the slaughter. But his was the melancholy of a life without aim sufficient to its strength, without a vision matching its energy. To suffer for God's cause is the rarest of joys and that Samson never knew though he was judge in Israel.

We imagine then that in default of any excitement such as he craved in the towns of his own land he turned his eyes to the Philistine cities which presented a marked contrast. There life was energetic and gay, there many pleasures were to be had. New colonists were coming in their swift ships and the streets presented a scene of constant animation. The strong eager man, full of animal passion, found the life he craved in Gaza where he mingled with the crowds and heard tales of strange existence. Nor was there wanting the opportunity for enjoyment which at home

he could not indulge. Beyond the critical observation of the elders of Dan he could take his fill of sensual pleasure. Not without danger of course. In some brawl the Philistines might close upon him. But he trusted to his strength to escape from their hands, and the risk increased the excitement. We must suppose that, having seen the nearer and less important towns such as Ekron, Gath and Ashkelon he now ventured to Gaza in quest of amusement, in order, as people say, to see the world.

A constant peril this of seeking excitement, especially in an age of high civilization. The means of variety and stimulus are multiplied, and ever the craving outruns them, a craving yielded to, with little or no resistance, by many who should know better. The moral teacher must recognize the desire for variety and excitement as perhaps the chief of all the hindrances he has now to overcome. For one who desires duty there are scores who find it dull and tame and turn from it, without sense of fault, to the gaieties of civilized society in which there is "nothing wrong" as they say, or at least so little of the positively wrong that conscience is easily appeased. The religious teacher finds the demand for "brightness" and variety before him at every turn; he is indeed often touched by it himself and follows with more or less of doubt a path that leads straight from his professed goal. "Is amusement devilish?" asks one. Most people reply with a smile that life must be lively or it is not worth having. And the Philistinism that attracts them with its dash and gaudiness is not far away nor hard to reach. It is not necessary to go across to the Continent where the brilliance of Vienna or Paris offers a contrast to the grey dulness of a country village; nor even to London

where amid the lures of the midnight streets there is peril of the gravest kind. Those who are restless and foolhardy can find a Gaza and a valley of Sorek nearer home, in the next market town. Philistine life, lax in morals, full of rattle and glitter, heat and change, in gambling, in debauchery, in sheer audacity of movement and talk, presents its allurements in our streets, has its acknowledged haunts in our midst. Young people brought up to fear God in quiet homes whether of town or country are enticed by the whispered counsels of comrades half ashamed of the things they say, yet eager for more companionship in what they secretly know to be folly or worse. Young women are the prey of those who disgrace manhood and womanhood by the offers they make, the insidious lies they tell. The attraction once felt is apt to master. As the current that rushes swiftly bears them with it they exult in the rapid motion even while life is nearing the fatal cataract. Subtle is the progress of infidelity. From the persuasion that enjoyment is lawful and has no peril in it the mind quickly passes to a doubt of the old laws and warnings. Is it so certain that there is a reward for purity and unworldliness? Is not all the talk about a life to come a jangle of vain words? The present is a reality, death a certainty, life a swiftly passing possession. They who enjoy know what they are getting. The rest is dismissed as altogether in the air.

With Samson, as there was less of faith and law to fling aside, there was less hardening of heart. He was half a heathen always, more conscious of bodily than of moral strength, reliant on that which he had, indisposed to seek from God the holy vigour which he valued little. At Gaza where moral weakness endangered life his well-knit muscles released him. We see him

among the Philistines entrapped, apparently in a position from which there is no escape. The gate is closed and guarded. In the morning he is to be seized and killed. But aware of his danger, his mind not put completely off its balance as yet by the seductions of the place, he arises at midnight and, plucking the doors of the city-gate from their sockets carries them to the top of a hill which fronts Hebron.

Here is represented what may at first be quite possible to one who has gone into a place of temptation and danger. There is for a time a power of resolution and action which when the peril of the hour is felt may be brought into use. Out of the house which is like the gate of hell, out of the hands of vile tempters it is possible to burst in quick decision and regain liberty. In the valley of Sorek it may be otherwise, but here the danger is pressing and rouses the will. Yet the power of rising suddenly against temptation, of breaking from the company of the impure is not to be reckoned on. It is not of ourselves we can be strong and resolute enough, but of grace. And can a man expect divine succour in a harlot's den? He thinks he may depend upon a certain self-respect, a certain disgust at vile things and dishonourable life. But vice can be made to seem beautiful, it can overcome the aversion springing from self-respect and the best education. In the history of one and another of the famous and brilliant, from the god-like youth of Macedon to the genius of yesterday the same unutterably sad lesson is taught us; we trace the quick descent of vice. Self-respect? Surely to Goethe, to George Sand, to Musset, to Burns that should have remained, a saving salt. But it is clear that man has not the power of preserving himself. While he says in his

heart, That is beneath me; I have better taste; I shall never be guilty of such a low, false and sickening thing —he has already committed himself.

Samson heard the trampling of feet in the streets and was warned of physical danger. When midnight came he lost no time. But he was too late. The liberty he regained was not the liberty he had lost. Before he entered that house in Gaza, before he sat down in it, before he spoke to the woman there he should have fled. He did not; and in the valley of Sorek his strength of will is not equal to the need. Delilah beguiles him, tempts him, presses him with her wiles. He is infatuated; his secret is told and ruin comes.

Moral strength, needful decision in duty to self and society and God—few possess these because few have the high ideal before them, and the sense of an obligation which gathers force from the view of eternity. We live, most of us, in a very limited range of time. We think of to-morrow or the day beyond; we think of years of health and joy in this world, rarely of the boundless after-life. To have a stain upon the character, a blunted moral sense, a scar that disfigures the mind seems of little account because we anticipate but a temporary reproach or inconvenience. To be defiled, blinded, maimed for ever, to be incapacitated for the labour and joy of the higher world does not enter into our thought. And many who are nervously anxious to appear well in the sight of men are shameless when God only can see. Moral strength does not spring out of such imperfect views of obligation. What availed Samson's fidelity to the Nazirite vow when by another gate he let in the foe?

The common kind of religion is a vow which covers two or three points of duty only. The value and glory

of the religion of the Bible are that it sets us on our guard and strengthens us against everything that is dangerous to the soul and to society. Suppose it were asked, wherein our strength lies, what would be the answer? Say that one after another stood aside conscious of being without strength until one was found willing to be tested. Assume that he could say, I am temperate, I am pure; passion never masters me: so far the account is good. You hail him as a man of moral power, capable of serving society. But you have to inquire further before you can be satisfied. You have to say, Some have had too great liking for money. Francis Bacon, Lord Chancellor of England, notable in the first rank of philosophers, took bribes and was convicted upon twenty-three charges of corruption. Are you proof against covetousness? because if you can be tempted by the glitter of gold reliance cannot be placed upon you. And again it must be asked of the man—Is there any temptress who can wind you about her fingers, overcome your conscientious scruples, wrest from you the secret you ought to keep and make you break your covenant with God, even as Delilah overcame Samson? Because, if there is, you are weaker than a vile woman and no dependence can be placed upon you. We learn from history what this kind of temptation does. We see one after another, kings, statesmen, warriors who figure bravely upon the scene for a time, their country proud of them, the best hopes of the good centred in them, suddenly in the midst of their career falling into pitiable weakness and covering themselves with disgrace. Like Samson they have loved some woman in the valley of Sorek. In the life of to-day instances of the same pitiable kind occur in every rank and class. The shadow falls on men who

held high places in society or stood for a time as pillars in the house of God.

Or, taking another case, one may be able to say, I am not avaricious, I have fidelity, I would not desert a friend nor speak a falsehood for any bribe; I am pure; for courage and patriotism you may rely upon me:—here are surely signs of real strength. Yet that man may be wanting in the divine faithfulness on which every virtue ultimately depends. With all his good qualities he may have no root in the heavenly, no spiritual faith, ardour, decision. Let him have great opposition to encounter, long patience to maintain, generosity and self-denial to exercise without prospect of quick reward—and will he stand? In the final test nothing but fidelity to the Highest, tried and sure fidelity to God can give a man any right to the confidence of others. That chain alone which is welded with the fire of holy consecration, devotion of heart and strength and mind to the will of God is able to bear the strain. If we are to fight the battles of life and resist the urgency of its temptations the whole divine law as Christ has set it forth must be our Nazirite vow and we must count ourselves in respect of every obligation the bondmen of God. Duty must not be a matter of self-respect but of ardent aspiration. The way of our life may lead us into some Gaza full of enticements, into the midst of those who make light of the names we revere and the truths we count most sacred. Prosperity may come with its strong temptations to pride and vainglory. If we would be safe it must be in the constant gratitude to God of those who feel the responsibility and the hope that are kindled at the cross, as those who have died with Christ and now live with Him unto God. In this redeemed life it may

be almost said there is no temptation; the earthly ceases to lure, gay shows and gauds cease to charm the soul. There still are comforts and pleasures in God's world, but they do not enchain. A vision of the highest duty and reality overshines all that is trivial and passing. And this is life—the fulness, the charm, the infinite variety and strength of being. "How can he that is dead to the world live any longer therein?" Yet he lives as he never did before.

In the experience of Samson in the valley of Sorek we find another warning. We learn the persistence with which spiritual enemies pursue those whom they mark for their prey. It has been said that the adversaries of good are always most active in following the best men with their persecutions. This we take leave to deny. It is when a man shows some weakness, gives an opportunity for assault that he is pressed and hunted as a wounded lion by a tribe of savages. The occasion was given to the Philistines by Samson's infatuation. Had he been a man of stern purity they would have had no point of attack. But Delilah could be bribed. The lords of the Philistines offered her a large sum to further their ends, and she, a willing instrument, pressed Samson with her entreaties. Baffled again and again she did not rest till the reward was won.

We can easily see the madness of the man in treating lightly, as if it were a game he was sure to win, the solicitations of the adventuress. "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson"—again and again he heard that threat and laughed at it. The green withes, the new ropes with which he was bound were snapped at will. Even when his hair was woven into the web he could go away with web and beam and the pin with which

they had been fixed to the ground. But if he had been aware of what he was doing how could he have failed to see that he was approaching the fatal capitulation, that wiles and blandishments were gaining upon him? When he allowed her to tamper with the sign of his vow it was the presage of the end.

So it often is. The wiles of the spirit of this world are woven very cunningly. First the "over-scrupulous" observance of religious ordinances is assailed. The tempter succeeds so far that the Sabbath is made a day of pleasure: then the cry is raised, "The Philistines be upon thee." But the man only laughs. He feels himself quite strong as yet, able for any moral task. Another lure is framed—gambling, drinking. It is yielded to moderately, a single bet by way of sport, one deep draught on some extraordinary occasion. He who is the object of persecution is still self-confident. He scorns the thought of danger. A prey to gambling, to debauchery? He is far enough from that. But his weakness is discovered. Satanic profit is to be made out of his fall; and he shall not escape.

It is true as ever it was that the friendship of the world is a snare. When the meshes of time and sense close upon us we may be sure that the end aimed at is our death. The whole world is a valley of Sorek to weak man, and at every turn he needs a higher than himself to guard and guide him. He is indeed a Samson, a child in morals, though full-grown in muscle. There are some it is true who are able to help, who if they were beside in the hour of peril would interpose with counsel and warning and protection. But a time comes to each of us when he has to go alone through the dangerous streets. Then unless he holds straight forward, looking neither to right hand nor left,

pressing towards the mark, his weakness will be quickly detected, that secret tendency scarcely known to himself by which he can be most easily assailed. Nor will it be forgotten if once it has been discovered. It is now the property of a legion. Be it vanity or avarice, ambition or sensuousness, the Philistines know how to gain their end by means of it. There is strength indeed to be had. The weakest may become strong, able to face all the tempters in the world and to pass unscathed through the streets of Gaza or the crowds of Vanity Fair. Nor is the succour far away. Yet to persuade men of their need and then to bring them to the feet of God are the most difficult of tasks in an age of self-sufficiency and spiritual unreason. Harder than ever is the struggle to rescue the victims of worldly fashion, enticement and folly: for the false word has gone forth that here and here only is the life of man and that renouncing the temporal is renouncing all.

XXIII.

THE VALLEY OF SOREK AND OF DEATH.

JUDGES xvi. 4-31.

THE strong bold man who has blindly fought his battles and sold himself to the traitress and to the enemy,

> "Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,"

the sport and scorn of those who once feared him, is a mournful object. As we look upon him there in his humiliation, his temper and power wasted, his life withered in its prime, we almost forget the folly and the sin, so much are we moved to pity and regret. For Samson is a picture, vigorous in outline and colour, of what in a less striking way many are and many more would be if it were not for restraints of divine grace. A fallen hero is this. But the career of multitudes without the dash and energy ends in the like misery of defeat; nothing done, not much attempted, their existence fades into the sere and yellow leaf. There has been no ardour to make death glorious.

Every man has his defects, his besetting sins, his dangers. It is in the consciousness of our own that we approach with sorrow the last scenes of the eventful history of Samson. Who dares cast a stone at him?

Who can fling a taunt as he is seen groping about in his blindness?

> "A little onward lend thy guiding hand
> To these dark steps, a little further on.
> For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade;
> There I am wont to sit when any chance
> Relieves me from my task of servile toil.
> O dark, dark, dark amid the blaze of noon,
> Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
> Without all hope of day:"

so we hear him bewail his lot. And we, perchance, feeling weakness creep over us while bonds of circumstance still hold us from what we see to be our divine calling,—we compassionate ourselves in pitying him; or, if we are as yet strong and buoyant, our history before us, plans for useful service of our time clearly in view, have we not already felt the symptoms of moral infirmity which make it doubtful whether we shall reach our goal? There are many hindrances, and even the brave unselfish man who never loiters in Gaza or in the treacherous valley may find his way barred by obstacles he cannot remove. But in the case of most the hindrances within are the most numerous and powerful. This man who should effect much for his age is held by love which blinds him, that other by hatred which masters him. Now covetousness, now pride is the deterrent. Many begin to know themselves and the difficulty of doing great tasks for God and man when noontide is past and the day has begun to decline. Great numbers have only dreamed of attempting something and have never bestirred themselves to act. So it is that Samson's defeat appears a symbol of the pathetic human failure. To many his character is full of sad interest, for in it they see what

they have fears of becoming or what they have already become.

What has Samson lost when he has revealed his secret to Delilah? Observe him when he goes forth from the woman's house and stands in the sunlight. Apart from the want of his waving locks he seems the same and is physically the same; muscle and sinew, bone and nerve, stout-beating heart and strong arm, Samson is there. And his human will is as eager as ever; he is a bold daring man this morning as he was last evening, with the same dream of "breaking through all" and bearing himself as king. But he is more lonely than ever before; something has gone from his soul. A heavy sense of faithlessness to one prized distinction and known duty oppresses him. Shake thyself as at other times, poor rash Samson, but know in thy heart that at last thou art powerless: the audacity of faith is no longer thine. Thou art the natural man still, but that is not enough, the spiritual sanction gone. The Philistines, half afraid, gather about thee ten to one; they can bind now and lead captive for thou hast lost the girdle which knit thy powers together and made thee invincible. The consciousness of being God's man is gone—the consciousness of being true to that which united thee in a rude but very real bond to the Almighty. Thou hast scorned the vow which kept thee from the abyss, and with the knowledge of utter moral baseness comes physical prostration, despair, feebleness, ruin. Samson at last knows himself to be no king at all, no hero nor judge.

It is common to think the spiritual of little account, faith in God of little account. Suppose men give that up; suppose they no longer hold themselves bound by

duty to the Almighty; they expect nevertheless to continue the same. They will still have their reason, their strength of body and of mind; they believe that all they once did they shall still be able to do and now more freely in their own way, therefore even more successfully. Is that so? Hope is a spiritual thing. It is apart from bodily strength, distinct from energy and manual skill. Take hope away from a man, the strongest, the bravest, the most intelligent, and will he be the same? Nay. His eye loses its lustre; the vigour of his will decays; he lies powerless and defeated. Or take love away—love which is again a spiritual thing. Let the ardour, the reason for exertion which love inspired pass away. Let the man who loved and would have dared all for love be deprived of that source of vital power, and he will dare no longer. Sad and weary and dispirited he will cast himself down careless of life.

But hope and love are not so necessary to the full tide of human vigour, are not so potent in stirring the powers of manhood as the friendship of God, the consciousness that made by God for ends of His we have Him as our stay. Indeed without this consciousness manhood never finds its strength. This gives a hope far higher and more sustaining than any of a personal or temporal kind. It makes us strong by virtue of the finest and deepest affection which can possibly move us; and more than that it gives to life full meaning, proper aim and justification. A man without the sense of a divine origin and election has no standing-ground; he is so to speak without the right of existence, he has no claim to be heard in speaking and to have a place among those who act. But he who feels himself to be in the world on God's business, to be God's servant,

has his assured place and claim as a man, and can see reason and purpose for every sharp trial to which he is put. Here then is the secret of strength, the only source of power and steadfastness for any man or woman. And he who has had it and lost it, breaking with God for the sake of gain or pleasure or some earthly affection, must like Samson feel his vigour sapped, his confidence forfeited. Now his power to command, to advise, to contend for any worthy result has passed away. He is a tree whose root ceases to feed in the soil though still the leaves are green.

The spiritual loss, the loss of living faith, is the great one: but is it for that we generally pity ourselves or any person known to us? Life and freedom are dear, the ability to put forth energy at our will, the sense of capacity; and it is the loss of these in outward and visible ranges that most moves us to grief. We commiserate the strong man whose exploits in the world seem to be over, as we pity the orator whose power of speech is gone, the artist who can no more handle the brush, the eager merchant whose bargaining is done. We give our sympathy to Samson, because in the midst of his days he has fallen overcome by treachery, because the cruelty of enemies has afflicted him. Yet, looking at the truth of things, the real cause of pity is deeper than any of these and different. A man who is still in living touch with God can suffer the saddest deprivations and retain a cheerful heart, unbroken courage and hope. Suppose that Samson, surprised by his enemies while he was about some worthy task, had been seized, deprived of his sight, bound with fetters of iron and consigned to prison. Should we then have had to pity him as we must when he is taken, a traitor to himself, the dupe of a deceiver, with

the badge of his vow and the sense of his fidelity gone? We feel with Jeremiah in his affliction; we feel with John the Baptist confined in the prison into which Herod has cast him, with St. Paul in the Philippian dungeon and with St. Peter lying bound with chains in the castle of Jerusalem. But we do not commiserate, we admire and exult. Here are men who endure for the right. They are martyrs, fellow-sufferers with Christ; they are marching with the cohorts of God to the deliverances of eternity. Ah! It is the men who are "martyrs by the pang without the palm," the men who have lost not only liberty but nobleness, who dragged after false lures have sold their prudence and their strength—these it is for whom we need to weep. He who doing his duty has been mastered by enemies, he who fighting a brave battle has been overcome—let us not dare to pity him. But the man who has given up the battle of faith, who has lost his glory, him the heavens look upon with the profound sorrow that is called for by a wasted life.

And how pathetic the touch: "He wist not that the Lord had departed from him." For a little time he failed to realize the spiritual disaster he had brought on himself. For a little time only; soon the dark conviction seized him. But worse still would have been his case if he had remained unconscious of loss. This sense of weakness is the last boon to the sinner. God still does this for him, poor headstrong child of nature as he would fain be, living by and for himself: he is not permitted. Whether he will own it or not he shall be weak and useless until he returns to God and to himself. Often indeed we find the enslaved Samson refusing to allow that anything is wrong with him. Out of sight of the world, in some very secret

place he has broken the obligations of faith, temperance, chastity, and yet thinks no special result has followed. He can meet the demands of society and that is enough, supposing the matter should come to light. Of the subtle poisoning of his own soul he has no thought. Is the thing hidden then? The law which determines that as a man is so his strength shall be follows every one into the most secret place. It keeps watch over our veracity, our sobriety, our purity, our faithfulness. Whenever in one point our covenant with God is broken a part of strength is taken away. Do we not perceive the loss? Do we flatter ourselves that all is as before? That is only our spiritual blindness; the fact remains.

What a pitiful thing it is to see men in this plight trying in vain to go about as if nothing had happened and they were as fit as ever for their places in society and in the church! We do not speak solely of sins like those into which Samson and David fell. There are others, scarcely reckoned sins, which as surely result in moral weakness perceived or unperceived, in the loss of God's countenance and support. Our covenant is to be pure and also merciful; let one fail in mercifulness, let there be a harsh pitiless temper cherished in secret, and this as well as impurity will make him morally weak. Our covenant is to be generous as well as honest; let a man keep from the poor and from the church what he ought to give, and he will lose his strength of soul as surely as if he cheated another in trade, or took what was not his own. But we distinguish between sin and default and think of the latter as a mere infirmity which has no ill effect. There is no acknowledgment of loss even when it has become almost complete. The man who is not generous

nor merciful, nor a defender of faith goes on thinking all is well with him, imagining that his futile religious exercises or gifts to this and that keep him on good terms with God and that he is helping the world, while in truth he has not the moral strength of a child. He acts the part of a Christian teacher or servant of the church, he leads in prayer, he joins in deliberations that have to do with the success of Christian work. To himself all seems satisfactory and he expects that good shall result from his efforts. But it cannot be. There is the strain of exertion but no power.

Do we wonder that more is not effected by our organizations, religious and other, which seem so powerful, quite capable of Christianising and reforming the world? The reason is that many of the professed religious and benevolent, who appear zealous and strenuous, are dying at heart. The Lord may not have departed from them utterly; they are not dead; there is still a rootlet of spiritual being. But they cannot fight; they cannot help others; they cannot run in the way of God's commandments. Are we not bound to ask ourselves how we stand, whether any failure in our covenant-keeping has made us spiritually weak. If we are paltering with eternal facts, if between us and the one Source of Life there is a widening distance surely the need is urgent for a return to Christian honour and fidelity which will make us strong and useful.

And there is something here in the story of Samson that bids us think hopefully of a new way and a new life. In the misery to which he was reduced there came to him with renewed acceptance of his vow a fresh endowment of vigour. It is the divine healing, the grace of the long-suffering Father which are thus

represented. No human soul needs to be utterly disconsolate, for grace waits ever on discomfiture. Return to me, says the Lord, and I will return to you; I will heal your backslidings and love you freely. Out of the deepest depths there is a way to the heights of spiritual privilege and power. To confess our faults and sins, to resume the fidelity, the uprightness, the generosity and mercifulness we renounced, to take again the straight upward path of self-denial and duty —this is always reserved for the soul that has not utterly perished. The man, young or old, who has become weaker than a child for any good work may hear the call that speaks of hope. He who in self-indulgence or hard worldliness has abandoned God may turn again to the Father's entreaty, "Remember from what thou hast fallen and repent."

We pass now to consider a point suggested by the terms in which the Philistines triumphed over their captured foe. When the people saw him they praised their God: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hand our enemy, and the destroyer of our country which hath slain many of us. Here the ignorant religiousness and gratitude of Philistines to a god which was no God might provoke a smile were it not for the consideration that under the clear light of Christianity equal ignorance is often shown by those who profess to be piously grateful. You say it was the bribe which the Philistine lords offered to Delilah and her treachery and Samson's sin that put him in the enemy's hand. You say, Surely the most ignorant man in Gaza must have seen that Dagon had nothing whatever to do with the result. And yet it is very common to ascribe to God what is nowise His doing. There are indeed times when we almost shudder to hear God thanked

for that which could only be attributed to a Dagon or a Moloch.

We are told of the tribal gods of those old Syrians —Baal, Melcarth, Sutekh, Milcom and the rest—each adored as master and protector by some people or race. Piously the devotees of each god acknowledged his hand in every victory and every fortunate circumstance, at the same time tracing to his anger and their own neglect of duty to him all calamities and defeats. May it not be said that the belief of many still is in a tribal god, falsely called by the name of Jehovah, a god whose chief function is to look after their interests whoever may suffer, and take their side in all quarrels whoever may be in the right? Men make for themselves the rude outline of a divinity who is supposed to be indifferent or hostile to every circle but their own, suspicious of every church but their own, careless of the sufferings of all but themselves. In two countries that are at war prayers for success will ascend in almost the same terms to one who is thought of as a national protector, not to the Father of all; each side is utterly regardless of the other, makes no allowance in prayer for the possibility that the other may be in the right. The thanksgivings of the victors too will be mixed with glorying almost fiendish over the defeated, whose blood, it may be, dyed in pathetic martyrdom their own hill-sides and valleys. In less flagrant cases, where it is only a question of gain or loss in trade, of getting some object of desire, the same spirit is shown. God is thanked for bestowing that of which another, perhaps more worthy, is deprived. It is not to the kindness of Heaven, but rather to the proving severity of God, we may say, that the result is due. Looking on with clear eyes we see something very different

from divine approval in the prosperous efforts of unscrupulous push and wire-pulling. Those who have much success in the world have need to justify their comforts and the praise they enjoy. They need to show cause to the ranks of the obscure and ill-paid for their superior fortune. Success like theirs cannot be admitted as a special mark of the favour of that God Whose ways are equal, Whose name is the Holy and Just.

Next look at the ignoble task to which Samson is put by the Philistines, a type of the ignominious uses to which the hero may be doomed by the crowd. The multitude cannot be trusted with a great man.

In the prison at Gaza the fallen chief was set to grind corn, to do the work of slaves. To him, indeed, work was a blessing. From the bitter thoughts that would have eaten out his heart he was somewhat delivered by the irksome labour. In reality, as we now perceive, no work degrades; but a man of Samson's type and period thought differently. The Philistine purpose was to degrade him; and the Hebrew captive would feel in the depths of his hot brooding nature the humiliating doom. Look then at the parallels. Think of a great statesman placed at the head of a nation to guide its policy in the line of righteousness, to bring its laws into harmony with the principles of human freedom and divine justice—think of such a one, while labouring at his sacred task with all the ardour of a noble heart, called to account by those whose only desire is for better trade, the means of beating their rivals in some market or bolstering up their failing speculations. Or see him at another time pursued by the cry of a class that feels its prescriptive rights invaded or its position threatened. Take again a poet, an artist, a writer, a

preacher intent on great themes, eagerly following after the ideal to which he has devoted himself, but exposed every moment to the criticism of men who have no soul—held up to ridicule and reprobation because he does not accept vulgar models and repeat the catchwords of this or that party. Philistinism is always in this way asserting its claim, and ever and anon it succeeds in dragging some ardent soul into the dungeon to grind thenceforth at the mill.

With the very highest too it is not afraid to intermeddle. Christ Himself is not safe. The Philistines of to-day are doing their utmost to make His name inglorious. For what else is the modern cry that Christianity should be chiefly about the business of making life comfortable in this world and providing not only bread but amusement for the crowd? The ideas of the church are not practical enough for this generation. To get rid of sin—that is a dream; to make men fearers of God, soldiers of truth, doers of righteousness at all hazards—that is in the air. Let it be given up; let us seek what we can reach; bind the name of Christ and the Spirit of Christ in chains to the work of a practical secularism, and let us turn churches into pleasant lounging places and picture galleries. Why should the soul have the benefit of so great a name as that of the Son of God? Is not the body more? Is not the main business to have houses and railways, news and enjoyment? The policy of undeifying Christ is having too much success. If it make way there will soon be need for a fresh departure into the wilderness.

The last scene of Samson's history awaits us—the gigantic effort, the awful revenge in which the Hebrew champion ended his days. In one sense it aptly

crowns the man's career. The sacred historian is not composing a romance, yet the end could not have been more fit. Strangely enough it has given occasion for preaching the doctrine of self-sacrifice as the only means of highest achievement, and we are asked to see here an example of the finest heroism, the most sublime devotion. Samson dying for his country is likened to Christ dying for His people.

It is impossible to allow this for a moment. Not Milton's apology for Samson, not the authority of all the illustrious men who have drawn the parallel can keep us from deciding that this was a case of vengeance and self-murder not of noble devotion. We have no sense of vindicated principle when we see that temple fall in terrible ruin, but a thrill of disappointment and keen sorrow that a servant of Jehovah should have done this in His name. The lords of the Philistines, all the *serens* or chiefs of the hundred cities are gathered in the ample porch of the building. True, they are assembled at an idolatrous feast; but this idolatry is their religion which they cannot choose but exercise for they know of no better, nor has Samson ever done one deed or spoken one word that could convince them of error. True, they are met to rejoice over their enemy and they call for him in cruel vainglory to make them sport. Yet this is the man who for his sport and in his revenge once burned the standing corn of a whole valley and more than once went on slaying Philistines till he was weary. True, Samson as a patriotic Israelite views these people as enemies. Yet it was among them he first sought a wife and afterwards pleasure. And now, if he decides to die that he may kill a thousand enemies at once, is the self-chosen death less an act of suicide?

If this was truly a fine act of self-sacrifice what good came of it? The sacrifice that is to be praised does distinct and clearly purposed service to some worthy cause or high moral end. We do not find that this dreadful deed reconciled the Philistines to Israel or moved them to belief in Jehovah. We observe, on the contrary, that it went to increase the hatred between race and race, so that when Canaanites, Moabites, Ammonites, Midianites no longer vex Israel these Philistines show more deadly antagonism—antagonism of which Israel knew the heat when on the red field of Gilboa the kingly Saul and the well-beloved Jonathan were together stricken down in death. If there was in Samson's mind any thought of vindicating a principle it was that of Israel's dignity as the people of Jehovah. But here his testimony was worthless.

As we have already said, much is written about self-sacrifice which is sheer mockery of truth, most falsely sentimental. Men and women are urged to the notion that if they can only find some pretext for renouncing freedom, for curbing and endangering life, for stepping aside from the way of common service that they may give up something in an uncommon way for the sake of any person or cause, good will come of it. The doctrine is a lie. The sacrifice of Christ was not of that kind. It was under the influence of no blind desire to give up His life, but first under the pressure of a supreme providential necessity, then in renunciation of the earthly life for a clearly seen and personally embraced divine end, the reconciliation of man to God, the setting forth of a propitiation for the sin of the world—for this it was He died. He willed to be our Saviour; having so chosen He bowed to the burden that was laid upon Him. "It pleased the Lord to

bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." To the end He foresaw and desired there was but one way—and the way was that of death because of man's wickedness and ruin.

Suffering for itself is no end and never can be to God or to Christ or to a good man. It is a necessity on the way to the ends of righteousness and love. If personality is not a delusion and salvation a dream there must be in every case of Christian renunciation some distinct moral aim in view for every one concerned, and there must be at each step, as in the action of our Lord, the most distinct and unwavering sincerity, the most direct truthfulness. Anything else is a sin against God and humanity. We entreat would-be moralists of the day to comprehend before they write of "self-sacrifice." The sacrifice of the moral judgment is always a crime, and to preach needless suffering for the sake of covering up sin or as a means of atoning for past defects is to utter most unchristian falsehood.

Samson threw away a life of which he was weary and ashamed. He threw it away in avenging a cruelty; but it was a cruelty he had no reason to call a wrong. "O God, that I might be avenged!"—that was no prayer of a faithful heart. It was the prayer of envenomed hatred, of a soul still unregenerate after trial. His death was indeed *self*-sacrifice—the sacrifice of the higher self, the true self, to the lower. Samson should have endured patiently, magnifying God. Or we can imagine something not perfect yet heroic. Had he said to those Philistines, My people and you have been too long at enmity. Let there be an end of it. Avenge yourselves on me, then cease from harassing Israel,—that would have been like a brave man. But it is not this we find. And we close the story of Samson

more sad than ever that Israel's history has not taught a great man to be a good man, that the hero has not achieved the morally heroic, that adversity has not begotten in him a wise patience and magnanimity. Yet he had a place under Divine Providence. The dim troubled faith that was in his soul was not altogether fruitless. No Jehovah-worshipper would ever think of bowing before that god whose temple fell in ruins on the captive Israelite and his thousand victims.

XXIV.

THE STOLEN GODS

JUDGES xvii., xviii.

THE portion of the Book of Judges which begins with the seventeenth chapter and extends to the close is not in immediate connection with that which has gone before. We read (ch. xviii. 30) that "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land." But the proper reading is, "Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses." It would seem that the renegade Levite of the narrative was a near descendant of the great law-giver. So rapidly did the zeal of the priestly house decline that in the third or fourth generation after Moses one of his own line became minister of an idol temple for the sake of a living. It is evident, then, that in the opening of the seventeenth chapter we are carried back to the time immediately following the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, when Othniel was settling in the south and the tribes were endeavouring to establish themselves in the districts allotted to them. The note of time is of course far from precise, but the incidents are certainly to be placed early in the period.

We are introduced first to a family living in Mount Ephraim consisting of a widow and her son Micah

who is married and has sons of his own. It appears that on the death of the father of Micah a sum of eleven hunded shekels of silver, about a hundred and twenty pounds of our money—a large amount for the time—was missed by the widow, who after vain search for it spoke in strong terms about the matter to her son. He had taken the money to use in stocking his farm or in trade and at once acknowledged that he had done so and restored it to his mother, who hastened to undo any evil her words had caused by invoking upon him the blessing of God. Further she dedicated two hundred of her shekels to make graven and molten images in token of piety and gratitude.

We have here a very significant revelation of the state of religion. The indignation of Moses had burned against the people when at Sinai they made a rude image of gold, sacrificed to it and danced about it in heathen revel. We are reading of what took place say a century after that scene at the foot of Sinai, and already those who desire to show their devotion to the Eternal, very imperfectly known as Jehovah, make teraphim and molten images to represent Him. Micah has a sort of private chapel or temple among the buildings in his courtyard. He consecrates one of his sons to be priest of this little sanctuary. And the historian adds in explanation of this, as one keenly aware of the benefits of good government under a God-fearing monarch—"In those days there was no king in Israel. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

We need not take for granted that the worship in this hill-chapel was of the heathen sort. There was probably no Baal, no Astarte among the images; or, if there was, it may have been merely as representing a Syrian power prudently recognised but not adored.

No hint occurs in the whole story of a licentious or a cruel cult, although there must have been something dangerously like the superstitious practices of Canaan. Micah's chapel, whatever the observances were, gave direct introduction to the pagan forms and notions which prevailed among the people of the land. There already Jehovah was degraded to the rank of a nature-divinity, and represented by figures.

In one of the highland valleys towards the north of Ephraim's territory Micah had his castle and his ecclesiastical establishment—state and church in germ. The Israelites of the neighbourhood, who looked up to the well-to-do farmer for protection, regarded him all the more that he showed respect for religion, that he had this house of gods and a private priest. They came to worship in his sanctuary and to inquire of the ecclesiastic, who in some way endeavoured to discover the will of God by means of the teraphim and ephod. The ark of the covenant was not far away for Bethel and Gilgal were both within a day's journey. But the people did not care to be at the trouble of going so far. They liked better their own local shrine and its homelier ways; and when at length Micah secured the services of a Levite the worship seemed to have all the sanction that could possibly be desired.

It need hardly be said that God is not confined to a locality, that in those days as in our own the true worshipper could find the Almighty on any hill-top, in any dwelling or private place, as well as at the accredited shrine. It is quite true, also, that God makes large allowance for the ignorance of men and their need of visible signs and symbols of what is unseen and eternal. We must not therefore assume at once that in Micah's house of idols, before the

widow's graven and molten figures there could be no acceptable worship, no prayers that reached the ear of the Lord of Hosts. And one might even go the length of saying that, perhaps, in this schismatic sanctuary, this chapel of images, devotion could be quite as sincere as before the ark itself. Little good came of the religious ordinances maintained there during the whole period of the judges, and even in Eli's latter days the vileness and covetousness practised at Shiloh more than countervailed any pious influence. Local and family altars therefore must have been of real use. But this was the danger, that leaving the appointed centre of Jehovah-worship, where symbolism was confined within safe limits, the people should in ignorant piety multiply objects of adoration and run into polytheism. Hence the importance of the decree, afterwards recognised, that one place of sacrifice should gather to it all the tribes and that there the ark of the covenant with its altar should alone speak of the will and holiness of God. And the story of the Danite migration connected with this of Micah and his Levite well illustrates the wisdom of such a law, for it shows how, in the far north, a sanctuary and a worship were set up which, existing long for tribal devotion, became a national centre of impure worship.

The wandering Levite from Bethlehem-judah is one, we must believe, of many Levites, who having found no inheritance because the cities allotted to them were as yet unconquered spread themselves over the land seeking a livelihood, ready to fall in with any local customs of religion that offered them position and employment. The Levites were esteemed as men acquainted with the way of Jehovah, able to maintain that communication with Him without which no busi-

ness could be hopefully undertaken. Something of the dignity that was attached to the names of Moses and Aaron ensured them honourable treatment everywhere unless among the lowest of the people; and when this Levite reached the dwelling of Micah, beside which there seems to have been a khan or lodging-place for travellers, the chance of securing him was at once seized. For ten pieces of silver, say twenty-five shillings a year, with a suit of clothes and his food, he agreed to become Micah's private chaplain. At this very cheap rate the whole household expected a time of prosperity and divine favour. "Now know I," said the head of the family, "that the Lord will do me good seeing I have a Levite to my priest." We must fear that he took some advantage of the man's need, that he did not much consider the honour of Jehovah yet reckoned on getting a blessing all the same. It was a case of seeking the best religious privileges as cheaply as possible, a very common thing in all ages.

But the coming of the Levite was to have results Micah did not foresee. Jonathan had lived in Bethlehem, and some ten or twelve miles westward down the valley one came to Zorah and Eshtaol, two little towns of the tribe of Dan of which we have heard. The Levite had apparently become pretty well known in the district and especially in those villages to which he went to offer sacrifice or perform some other religious rite. And now a series of incidents brought certain old acquaintances to his new place of abode.

Even in Samson's time the tribe of Dan, whose territory was to be along the coast west from Judah, was still obliged to content itself with the slopes of the hills, not having got possession of the plain. In the earlier period with which we are now dealing the Danites

were in yet greater difficulty, for not only had they Philistines on the one side but Amorites on the other. The Amorites "would dwell," we are told, "in Mount Heres, in Aijalon and in Shaalbim." It was this pressure which determined the people about Zorah and Eshtaol to find if possible another place of settlement, and five men were sent out in search. Travelling north they took the same way as the Levite had taken, heard of the same khan in the hill-country of Ephraim and made it their resting-place for a night. The discovery of the Levite Jonathan followed and of the chapel in which he ministered with its wonderful array of images. We can suppose the deputation had thoughts they did not express, but for the present they merely sought the help of the priest, begging him to consult the oracle on their behalf and learn whether their mission would be successful. The five went on their journey with the encouragement, "Go in peace; before the Lord is your way wherein ye go."

Months pass without any more tidings of the Danites until one a day a great company is seen following the hill-road near Micah's farm. There are six hundred men girt with weapons of war with their wives and children and cattle, a whole clan on the march, filling the road for miles and moving slowly northward. The five men have indeed succeeded after a fashion. Away between Lebanon and Hermon in the region of the sources of Jordan they have found the sort of district they went to seek. Its chief town Laish stood in the midst of fertile fields with plenty of wood and water. It was a place, according to their large report, where was "no want of anything that is in the earth." Moreover the inhabitants, who seem to have been a Phœnician colony, dwelt by themselves quiet and secure

having no dealings or treaty with the powerful Zidonians. They were the very kind of people whom a sudden attack would be likely to subdue. There was an immediate migration of Danites to this fresh field, and in prospect of bloody work the men of Zorah and Eshtaol seem to have had no doubt as to the rightness of their expedition; it was enough that they had felt themselves straitened. The same reason appears to suffice many in modern times. Were the aboriginal inhabitants of America and Australia considered by those who coveted their land? Even the pretence of buying has not always been maintained. Murder and rapine have been the methods used by men of our own blood, our own name, and no nation under the sun has a record darker than the tale of British conquest.

Men who go forth to steal land are quite fit to attempt the strange business of stealing gods—that is appropriating to themselves the favour of divine powers and leaving other men destitute. The Danites as they pass Micah's house hear from their spies of the priest and the images that are in his charge. "Do you know that there is in these houses an ephod and teraphim and a graven image and a molten image? Now therefore consider what ye have to do." The hint is enough. Soon the court of the farmstead is invaded, the images are brought out and the Levite Jonathan, tempted by the offer of being made priest to a clan, is fain to accompany the marauders. Here is confusion on confusion. The Danites are thieves, brigands, and yet they are pious; so pious that they steal images to assist them in worship. The Levite agrees to the theft and accepts the offer of priesthood under them. He will be the minister of a set of thieves to forward their evil designs, and they knowing him to

be no better than themselves expect that his sacrifices and prayers will do them good. It is surely a capital instance of perverted religious ideas.

As we have said, these circumstances are no doubt recounted in order to show how dangerous it was to separate from the pure order of worship at the sanctuary. In after times this lesson was needed, especially when the first king of the northern tribes set his golden calves the one at Bethel, the other at Dan. Was Israel to separate from Judah in religion as well as in government? Let there be a backward look to the beginning of schism in those extraordinary doings of the Danites. It was in the city founded by the six hundred that one of Jeroboam's temples was built. Could any blessing rest upon a shrine and upon devotions which had such an origin, such an history?

May we find a parallel now? Is there a constituted religious authority with which soundness of belief and acceptable worship are so bound up that to renounce the authority is to be in the way of confusion and error, schism and eternal loss? The Romanist says so. Those who speak for the Papal church never cease to cry to the world that within their communion alone are truth and safety to be found. Renounce, they say, the apostolic and divine authority which we conserve and all is gone. Is there anarchy in a country? Are the forces that make for political disruption and national decay showing themselves in many lands? Are monarchies overthrown? Are the people lawless and wretched? It all comes of giving up the Catholic order and creed. Return to the one fold under the one Shepherd if you would find prosperity. And there are others who repeat the same injunction, not indeed denying that there may be saving faith apart from their

ritual, but insisting still that it is an error and a sin to seek God elsewhere than at the accredited shrine.

With Jewish ordinances we Christians have nothing to do when we are judging as to religious order and worship now. There is no central shrine, no exclusive human authority. Where Christ is, there is the temple; where He speaks, the individual conscience must respond. The work of salvation is His alone, and the humblest believer is His consecrated priest. When our Lord said, "The hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth"; and again, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them"; when He as the Son of God held out His hands directly to every sinner needing pardon and every seeker after truth, when He offered the one sacrifice upon the cross by which a living way is opened into the holiest place, He broke down the walls of partition and with the responsibility declared the freedom of the soul.

And here we reach the point to which our narrative applies as an illustration. Micah and his household worshipping the images of silver, the Levite officiating at the altar, seeking counsel of Jehovah by ephod and teraphim, the Danites who steal the gods, carry off the priest and set up a new worship in the city they build—all these represent to us types and stages of what is really schism pitiful and disastrous—that is, separation from the truth of things and from the sacred realities of divine faith. Selfish untruth and infidelity are schism, the wilderness and outlawry of the soul.

1. Micah and his household, with their chapel of images, their ephod and teraphim represent those who fall into the superstition that religion is good as insuring

temporal success and prosperity, that God will see to the worldly comfort of those who pay respect to Him. Even among Christians this is a very common and very debasing superstition. The sacraments are often observed as signs of a covenant which secures for men divine favour through social arrangements and human law. The spiritual nature and power of religion are not denied, but they are uncomprehended. The national custom and the worldly hope have to do with the observance of devout forms rather than any movement of the soul heavenward. A church may in this way become like Micah's household, and prayer may mean seeking good terms with Him who can fill the land with plenty or send famine and cleanness of teeth. Unhappily many worthy and most devout persons still hold the creed of an early and ignorant time. The secret of nature and providence is hid from them. The severities of life seem to them to be charged with anger, and the valleys of human reprobation appear darkened by the curse of God. Instead of finding in pain and loss a marvellous divine discipline they perceive only the penalty of sin, a sign of God's aversion not of His Fatherly grace. It is a sad, a terrible blindness of soul. We can but note it here and pass on, for there are other applications of the old story.

2. The Levite represents an unworthy worldly ministry. With sadness must confession be made that there are in every church pastors unspiritual, worldlings in heart whose desire is mainly for superiority of rank or of wealth, who have no vision of Christ's cross and battle except as objective and historical. Here, most happily, the cases of complete worldliness are rare. It is rather a tendency we observe than a developed and acknowledged state of things. Very few

of those in the ranks of the Christian ministry are entirely concerned with the respect paid to them in society and the number of shekels to be got in a year. That he keeps pace with the crowd instead of going before it is perhaps the hardest thing that can be said of the worldly pastor. He is humane, active, intelligent; but it is for the church as a great institution, or the church as his temporal hope and stay. So his ministry becomes at the best a matter of serving tables and providing alms—we shall not say amusement. Here indeed is schism; for what is farther from the truth of things, what is farther from Christ?

3. Once more we have with us to-day, very much with us, certain Danites of science, politics and the press who, if they could, would take away our God and our Bible, our Eternal Father and spiritual hope, not from a desire to possess but because they hate to see us believing, hate to see any weight of silver given to religious uses. Not a few of these are marching as they think triumphantly to commanding and opulent positions whence they will rule the thought of the world. And on the way, even while they deride and detest the supernatural, they will have the priest go with them. They care nothing for what he says; to listen to the voice of a spiritual teacher is an absurdity of which they would not be guilty; for to their own vague prophesying all mankind is to give heed, and their interpretations of human life are to be received as the bible of the age. Of the same order is the socialist who would make use of a faith he intends to destroy and a priesthood whose claim is offensive to him on his way to what he calls the organization of society. In his view the uses of Christianity and the Bible are temporal and earthly. He will not have Christ the

Redeemer of the soul, yet he attempts to conjure with Christ's words and appropriate the power of His name. The audacity of these would-be robbers is matched only by their ignorance of the needs and ends of human life.

We might here refer to the injustice practised by one and another band of our modern Israel who do not scruple to take from obscure and weak households of faith the sacraments and Christian ministry, the marks and rights of brotherhood. We can well believe that those who do this have never looked at their action from the other side, and may not have the least idea of the soreness they leave in the hearts of humble and sincere believers.

In fine, the Danites with the images of Micah went their way and he and his neighbours had to suffer the loss and make the best of their empty chapel where no oracle thenceforth spoke to them. It is no parable, but a very real example of the loss that comes to all who have trusted in forms and symbols, the outward signs instead of the living power of religion. While we repel the arrogance that takes from faith its symbolic props and stays we must not let ourselves deny that the very rudeness of an enemy may be an excellent discipline for the Christian. Agnosticism and science and other Danite companies sweep with them a good deal that is dear to the religious mind and may leave it very distressed and anxious—the chapel empty, the oracle as it may appear lost for ever. With the symbol the authority, the hope, the power seem to be lost irrecoverably. What now has faith to rest upon? But the modern spirit with its resolution to sweep away every unfact and mere form is no destroyer. Rather does it drive the Christian to a science, a virtue far

beyond its own. It forces we may say on faith that severe truthfulness and intellectual courage which are the proper qualities of Christianity, the necessary counterpart of its trust and love and grace. In short, when enemies have carried off the poor teraphim and fetishes which are their proper capture they have but compelled religion to be itself, compelled it to find its spiritual God, its eternal creed and to understand its Bible. This, though done with evil intent, is surely no cruelty, no outrage. Shall a man or a church that has been so roused and thrown back on reality sit wailing in the empty chapel for the images of silver and the deliverances of the hollow ephod? Everything remains, the soul and the spiritual world, the law of God, the redemption of Christ, the Spirit of eternal life.

XXV.

FROM JUSTICE TO WILD REVENGE.

JUDGES XIX.-XXI.

THESE last chapters describe a general and vehement outburst of moral indignation throughout Israel, recorded for various reasons. A vile thing is done in one of the towns of Benjamin and the fact is published in all the tribes. The doers of it are defended by their clan and fearful punishment is wrought upon them, not without suffering to the entire people. Like the incidents narrated in the chapters immediately preceding, these must have occurred at an early stage in the period of the judges, and they afford another illustration of the peril of imperfect government, the need for a vigorous administration of justice over the land. The crime and the volcanic vengeance belong to a time when there was "no king in Israel" and, despite occasional appeals to the oracle, "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." In this we have one clue to the purpose of the history.

The crime of Gibeah brought under our notice here connects itself with that of Sodom and represents a phase of immorality which, indigenous to Canaan, mixed its putrid current with Hebrew life. There are traces of the same horrible impurity in the Judah of Rehoboam and Asa; and in the story of Josiah's reign

we are horrified to read of "houses of Sodomites that were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah." With such lurid historical light on the subject we can easily understand the revival of this warning lesson from the past of Israel and the fulness of detail with which the incidents are recorded. A crime originally that of the off-scourings of Gibeah became practically the sin of a whole tribe, and the war that ensued sets in a clear light the zeal for domestic purity which was a feature in every religious revival and, at length, in the life of the Hebrew people.

It may be asked how, while polygamy was practised among the Israelites, the sin of Gibeah could rouse such indignation and awaken the signal vengeance of the united tribes. The answer is to be found partly in the singular and dreadful device which the indignant husband used in making the deed known. The ghastly symbols of outrage told the tale in a way that was fitted to stir the blood of the whole country. Everywhere the hideous thing was made vivid and a sense of utmost atrocity was kindled as the dissevered members were borne from town to town. It is easy to see that womanhood must have been stirred to the fieriest indignation, and manhood was bound to follow. What woman could be safe in Gibeah where such things were done? And was Gibeah to go unpunished? If so, every Hebrew city might become the haunt of miscreants. Further there is the fact that the woman so foully murdered, though a concubine, was the concubine of a Levite. The measure of sacredness with which the Levites were invested gave to this crime, frightful enough in any view, the colour of sacrilege. How degenerate were the people of Gibeah when

a servant of the altar could be treated with such foul indignity and driven to so extraordinary an appeal for justice? There could be no blessing on the tribes if they allowed the doers or condoners of this thing to go unpunished. Every Levite throughout the land must have taken up the cry. From Bethel and other sanctuaries the call for vengeance would spread and echo till the nation was roused. Thus, in part at least, we can explain the vehemence of feeling which drew together the whole fighting force of the tribes.

The doubt will yet remain whether there could have been so much purity of life or respect for purity as to sustain the public indignation. Some may say, Is there not here a sufficient reason for questioning the veracity of the narrative? First, however, let it be remembered that often where morals are far from reaching the level of pure monogamic life distinctions between right and wrong are sharply drawn. Acquaintance with phases of modern life that are most painful to the mind sensitively pure reveals a fixed code which none may infringe without bringing upon themselves reprobation, perhaps more vehement than in a higher social grade visits the breach of a higher law. It is the fact that concubinage has its unwritten acknowledgment and protecting customs. There is marriage that is only a name; there is concubinage that gives the woman more rights than one who is married. Against the immorality and the gross evils of cohabitation is to be set this unwritten law. And arguing from popular feeling in our great cities we reach the conclusion that in ancient Israel where concubinage prevailed there was a wide and keen feeling as to the rights of concubines and the necessity of upholding them. Many women must have been in this relation, below those

who could count themselves legally married, and all the more that the concubine occupied a place inferior to that of the lawful wife would popular opinion take up her cause and demand the punishment of those who did her wrong.

And here we are led to a point which demands clear statement and recognition. It has been too readily supposed that polygamy is always a result of moral decline and indicates a low state of domestic purity. It may, in truth, be a rude step of progress. Has it been sufficiently noted that in those countries in which the name of the mother not of the father descended to the children the reason may be found in universal or almost universal unchastity? In Egypt at one time the law gave to women, especially to mothers, peculiar rights; but to praise Egyptian civilization for this reason and hold up its treatment of women as an example to the nineteenth century is an extraordinary venture. The Israelites, however lax, were doubtless in advance of the society of Thebes. Among the Canaanites the moral degradation of women, whatever freedom may have gone with it, was so terrible that the Hebrew with his two or three wives and concubines, but with a morality otherwise severe, must have represented a new and holier social order as well as a new and holier religion. It is therefore not incredible but appears simply in accordance with the instincts and customs proper to the Hebrew people that the sin of Gibeah should provoke overwhelming indignation. There is no pretence of purity, no hypocritical anger. The feeling is sound and real. Perhaps in no other matter of a moral kind would there have been such intense and unanimous exasperation. A point of justice or of belief would not have so moved the tribes. The better

self of Israel appears asserting its claim and power. And the miscreants of Gibeah representing the lower self, verily an unclean spirit, are detested and denounced on every hand.

The time was that of fresh feeling, unwarped by those customs which in the guise of civilisation and refinement afterwards corrupted the nation. And we may see the prophetic or hortatory use of the narrative for an after age in which doings as vile as those at Gibeah were sanctioned by the court and protected even by religious leaders. It would be hoped by the sacred historian that this tale of the fierce indignation of the tribes might rouse afresh the same moral feeling. He would fain stir a careless people and their priests by the exhibition of this tumultuous vengeance. Nor can we say that the necessity for the impressive lesson has ceased. In the heart of our large cities vices as vile as those of Gibeah are heard muttering in the nightfall, life as abandoned lurks and festers creating a social gangrene.

Recognise, then, in these chapters a truth for all time boldly drawn out—the great truth as to moral reform and national purity. Law will not cure moral evils; a statute book the purest and noblest will not save. Those who by the impulse of the Spirit gathered the various traditions of Israel's life knew well that on a living conscience in men everything depended, and they at least indicate the further truth which many of ourselves have not grasped, that the early and rude workings of conscience, producing stormy and terrible results, are a necessary stage of development. As there must be energy before there can be noble energy, so there must be moral vigour, it may be rude, violent, ignorant, a stream rushing out of barbarian hills,

sweeping with most appalling vehemence, before there can be spiritual life patient calm and holy. Law is a product not a cause; it is not the code we make that will preserve us but the God-given conscience that informs the code and ever goes before it a pillar of fire, at times flashing vivid lightning. Even Christian law cannot save a people if it be merely a series of injunctions. Nothing will do but the mind of Christ in every man and woman continually inspiring and directing life. The reformer who thinks that a statute or regulation will end some sin or evil custom is in sad error. Say the decree he contends for is enacted; but have the consciences of those against whom it is made been quickened? If not, the law merely expresses a popular mood and the life of the whole community will not be permanently raised in tone.

The church finds here a perpetual mission of influence. Her doctrine is but half her message. From the doctrine as from an eternal fount must go life-giving moral heat in every range, and the Spirit is ever with her to make the word like a fire. Her duty is wide as righteousness, great as man's destiny; it is never ended, for each generation comes in a new hour with new needs. The church, say some, is finishing its work; it is doomed to be one of the broken moulds of life. But the church that is the instructor of conscience and kindles the flame of righteousness has a mission to the ages. We are far yet from that day of the Lord when all the people shall be prophets; and until then how can the world live without the church? It would be a body without a soul.

Conscience the oracle of life, conscience working badly rather than held in chains of mere rule without spontaneity and inspiration, moral energy widespread

personal and keen, however rude—here is one of the notes of the sacred writer; and another note, no less distinct, is the assertion of moral intolerance. It has not occurred to this prophetic annalist that endurance of evil has any curative power. He is a Hebrew, full of indignation against the vile and false, and he demands a heat of moral force in his people. Foul things are done at the court and even in the temple; there is a depraving indifference to purity, a loose notion (very similar to the idea of our day), that all the sides of life should have free play and that the heathen had much to teach Israel. The whole of the narrative before us is infused with a righteous protest against evil, a holy plea for intolerance of sin. Will men refuse instruction and persist in making themselves one with bestiality and outrage? Then judgment must deal with them on the ground they have chosen to occupy, and until they repent the conscience of the race must repudiate them together with their sin. Along with a keenly burning conscience there goes this necessity of moral intolerance. Charity is good, but not always in place; and brotherhood itself demands at times strong uncompromising judgment of the evil-doer. How else among men of weak wills and wavering hearts can righteousness vindicate and enforce itself as the eternal reality of life? Compassion is strong only when it is linked to unfaltering declarations; mercy is divine only when it turns a front of mail to wickedness and flashes lightning at proud wrong. Any other kind of charity is but a new offence—the sinner pardoning sin.

Now the people of Gibeah were not all vile. The wretches whose crime called for judgment were but the rabble of the town. And we can see that the tribes

when they gathered in indignation were made serious by the thought that the righteous might be punished with the wicked. We are told that they went up to the sanctuary and asked counsel of the Lord whether they should attack the convicted city. There was a full muster of the fighting men, their blood at fever heat, yet they would not advance without an oracle. It was an appeal to heavenly justice, and demands notice as a striking feature of the whole terrible series of events. For an hour there is silence in the camp till a higher voice shall speak.

But what is the issue? The oracle decrees an immediate attack on Gibeah in the face of all Benjamin which has shown the temper of heathenism by refusing to give up the criminals. Once and again there is trial of battle which ends in defeat of the allied tribes. The wrong triumphs; the people have to return humbled and weeping to the Sacred Presence and sit fasting and disconsolate before the Lord.

Not without the suffering of the entire community is a great evil to be purged from a land. It is easy to execute a murderer, to imprison a felon. But the spirit of the murderer, of the felon, is widely diffused, and that has to be cast out. In the great moral struggle year after year the better have not only the openly vile but all who are tainted, all who are weak in soul, loose in habit, secretly sympathetic with the vile, arrayed against them. There is a sacrifice of the good before the evil are overcome. In vicarious suffering many must pay the penalty of crimes not their own ere the wide-reaching wickedness can be seen in its demonic power and struck down as the cruel enemy of the people.

When an assault is made on some vile custom the

sardonic laugh is heard of those who find their profit and their pleasure in it. They feel their power. They know the wide sympathy with them spread secretly through the land. Once and again the feeble attempt of the good is repelled. With sad hearts, with impoverished means, those who led the crusade retire baffled and weary. Has their method been unintelligent? There very possibly lies the cause of its failure. Or, perhaps, it has been, though nominally inspired by an oracle, all too human, weak through human pride. Not till they gain with new and deeper devotion to the glory of God, with more humility and faith, a clearer view of the battle-ground and a better ordering of the war shall defeat be changed into victory. And may it not be that the assault on moral evils of our day, in which multitudes are professedly engaged, in which also many have spent substance and life, shall fail till there is a true humiliation of the armies of God before Him, a new consecration to higher and more spiritual ends? Human virtue has ever to be jealous of itself, the reformer may so easily become a Pharisee.

The tide turned and there came another danger, that which waits on ebullitions of popular feeling. A crowd roused to anger is hard to control, and the tribes having once tasted vengeance did not cease till Benjamin was almost exterminated. The slaughter extended not only to the fighting men, but to women and children. The six hundred who fled to the rock-fort of Rimmon appear as the only survivors of the clan. Justice overshot its mark and for one evil made another. Those who had most fiercely used the sword viewed the result with horror and amazement, for a tribe was lacking in Israel. Nor was this the end of slaughter. Next for the sake of Benjamin the sword was drawn

and the men of Jabesh-gilead were butchered. It has to be noticed that the oracle is not made responsible for this horrible process of evil. The people came of their own accord to the decision which annihilated Jabesh-gilead. But they gave it a pious colour; religion and cruelty went together, sacrifices to Jehovah and this frightful outbreak of demonism. It is one of the dark chapters of human history. For the sake of an oath and an idea death was dealt remorselessly. No voice suggested that the people of Jabesh may have been more cautious than the rest, not less faithful to the law of God. The others were resolved to appear to themselves to have been right in almost annihilating Benjamin; and the town which had not joined in the work of destruction must be punished.

The warning conveyed here is intensely keen. It is that men, made doubtful by the issue of their actions whether they have done wisely, may fly to the resolution to justify themselves and may do so even at the expense of justice; that a nation may pass from the right way to the wrong and then, having sunk to extraordinary baseness and malignity, may turn writhing and self-condemned to add cruelty to cruelty in the attempt to still the upbraidings of conscience. It is that men in the heat of passion which began with resentment against evil may strike at those who have not joined in their errors as well as those who truly deserve reprobation. We stand, nations and individuals, in constant danger of dreadful extremes, a kind of insanity hurrying us on when the blood is heated by strong emotion. Blindly attempting to do right we do evil, and again, having done the evil we blindly strive to remedy it by doing more. In times of moral darkness and chaotic social conditions, when men are

guided by a few rude principles, things are done that afterwards appal themselves, and yet may become an example for future outbreaks. During the fury of their Revolution the French people, with some watchwords of the true ring as liberty, fraternity, turned hither and thither, now in terror, now panting after dimly seen justice or hope, and it was always from blood to blood. We understand the juncture in ancient Israel and realize the excitement and the rage of a self-jealous people when we read the modern tales of surging ferocity in which men appear now hounding the shouting crowd to vengeance then shuddering on the scaffold.

In private life the story has an application against wild and violent methods of self-vindication. Many a man, hurried on by a just anger against one who has done him wrong, sees to his horror after a sharp blow is struck that he has broken a life and thrown a brother bleeding to the dust. One wrong thing has been done perhaps more in haste than vileness of purpose, and retribution, hasty, ill-considered, leaves the moral question tenfold more confused. When all is reckoned we find it impossible to say where the right is, where the wrong.

Passing to the final expedient adopted by the chiefs of Israel to rectify their error—the rape of the women at Shiloh—we see only to how pitiful a pass moral blundering brings those who fall into it: other moral teaching there is none. We might at first be disposed to say that there was extraordinary want of reverence for religious order and engagements when the men of Benjamin were invited to make a sacred festival the occasion of taking what the other tribes had solemnly vowed not to give. But the festival at Shiloh must

have been far more of a merry-making than of a sacred assembly. It needs to be recognised that many gatherings even in honour of Jehovah were mainly, like those of Canaanite worship, for hilarity and feasting. There was probably no great incongruity between the occasion and the plot.

But the scenes certainly change in the course of this narrative with extraordinary swiftness. Fierce indignation is followed by pity, weeping for defeat by tears for too complete a victory. Horrible bloodshed wastes the cities and in a month there is dancing in the plain of Shiloh not ten miles from the field of battle. Chaotic indeed are the morality and the history; but it is the disorder of social life in its early stages, with the vehemence and tenderness, the ferocity and laughter of a nation's youth. And, all along, the Book of Judges bears the stamp of veracity as a series of records because these very features are to be seen—this tumult, this undisciplined vehemence in feeling and act. Were we told here of decorous solemn progress at slow march, every army going forth with some stereotyped invocation of the Lord of Hosts, every leader a man of conventional piety supported by a blameless priesthood and orderly sacrifices, we should have had no evidence of truth. The traditions preserved here, whoever collected them, are singularly free from that idyllic colour which an imaginative writer would have endeavoured to give.

At the last, accordingly, the book we have been reading stands a real piece of history, proving itself over every kind of suspicion a true record of a people chosen and guided to a destiny greater than any other race of man has known. A people understanding its call and responding with eagerness at every point?

Nay. The world is in the heart of Israel as of every other nation. The carnal attracts, and malignant cries overbear the divine still voice; the air of Canaan breathes in every page, and we need to recollect that we are viewing the turbulent upper-waters of the nation and the faith. But the working of God is plain; the divine thoughts we believed Israel to have in trust for the world are truly with it from the first, though darkened by altars of Baal and of Ashtoreth. The Word and Covenant of Jehovah are vital facts of the supernatural which surrounds that poor struggling erring Hebrew flock. Theocracy is a divine fact in a larger sense than has ever been attached to the word. Inspiration too is no dream, for the history is charged with intimations of the spiritual order. The light of the unrealized end flashes on spear and altar, and in the frequent roll of the storm the voice of the Eternal is heard declaring righteousness and truth. No story this to praise a dynasty or magnify a conquering nation or support a priesthood. Nothing so faithful, so true to heaven and to human nature could be done from that motive. We have here an imperishable chapter in the Book of God.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

I.

NAOMI'S BURDEN.

RUTH i. 1-13.

LEAVING the Book of Judges and opening the story of Ruth we pass from vehement out-door life, from tempest and trouble into quiet domestic scenes. After an exhibition of the greater movements of a people we are brought, as it were, to a cottage interior in the soft light of an autumn evening, to obscure lives passing through the cycles of loss and comfort, affection and sorrow. We have seen the ebb and flow of a nation's fidelity and fortune, a few leaders appearing clearly on the stage and behind them a multitude indefinite, indiscriminate, the thousands who form the ranks of battle and die on the field, who sway together from Jehovah to Baal and back to Jehovah again. What the Hebrews were at home, how they lived in the villages of Judah or on the slopes of Tabor the narrative has not paused to speak of with detail. Now there is leisure after the strife and the historian can describe old customs and family events, can show us the toiling flockmaster, the busy reapers, the women with their cares and uncertainties, the love and labour of simple life. Thunderclouds of sin and judgment have rolled over the scene; but they have cleared away and we see human nature in examples that

become familiar to us, no longer in weird shadow or vivid lightning flash, but as we commonly know it, homely, erring, enduring, imperfect, not unblest.

Bethlehem is the scene, quiet and lonely on its high ridge overlooking the Judæan wilderness. The little city never had much part in the eager life of the Hebrew people, yet age after age some event notable in history, some death or birth or some prophetic word drew the eyes of Israel to it in affection or in hope; and to us the Saviour's birth there has so distinguished it as one of the most sacred spots on earth that each incident in the fields or at the gate appears charged with predictive meaning, each reference in psalm or prophecy has tender significance. We see the company of Jacob on a journey through Canaan halt by the way near Ephrath, which is Bethlehem, and from the tents there comes a sound of wailing. The beloved Rachel is dead. Yet she lives in a child new-born, the mother's Son of Sorrow, who becomes to the father Benjamin, Son of the Right Hand. The sword pierces a loving heart, but hope springs out of pain and life out of death. Generations pass and in these fields of Bethlehem we see Ruth gleaning, Ruth the Moabitess, a stranger and foreigner who has sought refuge under the shadow of Jehovah's wings; and at yonder gate she is saved from want and widowhood, finding in Boaz her *goël* and *menuchah*, her redeemer and rest. Later, another birth, this time within the walls, the birth of one long despised by his brethren, gives to Israel a poet and a king, the sweet singer of divine psalms, the hero of a hundred fights. And here again we see the three mighty men of David's troop breaking through the Philistine host to fetch for their chief a draught from the cool spring by the gate. Prophecy, too, leaves

Israel looking to the city on the hill. Micah seems to grasp the secret of the ages when he exclaims, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto Me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." For centuries there is suspense, and then over the quiet plain below the hill is heard the evangel: "Be not afraid: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Remembering this glory of Bethlehem we turn to the story of humble life there in the days when the judges ruled, with deep interest in the people of the ancient city, the race from which David sprang, of which Mary was born.

Jephthah had scattered Ammon behind the hills and the Hebrews dwelt in comparative peace and security. The sanctuary at Shiloh was at length recognised as the centre of religious influence; Eli was in the beginning of his priesthood, and orderly worship was maintained before the ark. People could live quietly about Bethlehem, although Samson, fitfully acting the part of champion on the Philistine border, had his work in restraining the enemy from an advance. Yet all was not well in the homesteads of Judah, for drought is as terrible a foe to the flockmaster as the Arab hordes, and all the south lands were parched and unfruitful.

We are to follow the story of Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion whose home at Bethlehem is about to be broken up. The sheep are dying in the bare glens, the cattle in the fields. From the soil usually so fertile little corn has been

reaped. Elimelech, seeing his possessions melt away, has decided to leave Judah for a time so as to save what remains to him till the famine is over, and he chooses the nearest refuge, the watered Field of Moab beyond the Salt Sea. It was not far; he could imagine himself returning soon to resume the accustomed life in the old home. True Hebrews, these Ephrathites were not seeking an opportunity to cast off pious duty and break with Jehovah in leaving His land. Doubtless they hoped that God would bless their going, prosper them in Moab and bring them back in good time. It was a trial to go, but what else could they do, life itself, as they believed, being at hazard?

With thoughts like these men often leave the land of their birth, the scenes of early faith, and oftener still without any pressure of necessity or any purpose of returning. Emigration appears to be forced upon many in these times, the compulsion coming not from Providence but from man and man's law. It is also an outlet for the spirit of adventure which characterizes some races and has made them the heirs of continents. Against emigration it would be folly to speak, but great is the responsibility of those by whose action or want of action it is forced upon others. May it not be said that in every European land there are persons in power whose existence is like a famine to a whole country-side? Emigration is talked of glibly as if it were no loss but always gain, as if to the mass of men the traditions and customs of their native land were mere rags well parted with. But it is clear from innumerable examples that many lose what they never find again, of honour, seriousness and faith.

The last thing thought of by those who compel emigration and many who undertake it of their own

accord is the moral result. That which should be first considered is often not considered at all. Granting the advantages of going from a land that is over-populated to some fertile region as yet lying waste, allowing what cannot be denied that material progress and personal freedom result from these movements of population, yet the risk to individuals is just in proportion to the worldly attraction. It is certain that in many regions to which the stream of migration is flowing the conditions of life are better and the natural environment purer than they are in the heart of large European cities. But this does not satisfy the religious thinker. Modern colonies have indeed done marvels for political independence, for education and comfort. Their success here is splendid. But do they see the danger? So much achieved in short time for the secular life tends to withdraw attention from the root of spiritual growth—simplicity and moral earnestness. The pious emigrant has to ask himself whether his children will have the same thought for religion beyond the sea as they would have at home, whether he himself is strong enough to maintain his testimony while he seeks his fortune.

We may believe that the Bethlehemite if he made a mistake in removing to Moab acted in good faith and did not lose his hope of the divine blessing. Probably he would have said that Moab was just like home. The people spoke a language similar to Hebrew, and like the tribes of Israel they were partly husbandmen partly keepers of cattle. In the "Field of Moab," that is the upland canton bounded by the Arnon on the north, the mountains on the east and the Dead Sea precipices on the west, people lived very much as they did about Bethlehem, only more safely and in greater

comfort. But the worship was of Chemosh, and Elimelech must soon have discovered how great a difference that made in thought and social custom and in the feeling of men toward himself and his family. The rites of the god of Moab included festivals in which humanity was disgraced. Standing apart from these he must have found his prosperity hindered, for Chemosh was lord in everything. An alien who had come for his own advantage yet refused the national customs would be scorned at least if not persecuted. Life in Moab became an exile, the Bethlehemites saw that hardship in their own land would have been as easy to endure as the disdain of the heathen and constant temptations to vile conformity. The family had a hard struggle, not holding their own and yet ashamed to return to Judah.

Already we have a picture of wayworn human lives tried on one side by the rigour of nature, on the other by unsympathetic fellow-creatures, and the picture becomes more pathetic as new touches are added to it. Elimelech died; the young men married women of Moab; and in ten years only Naomi was left, a widow with her widowed daughters-in-law. The narrative adds shadow to shadow. The Hebrew woman in her bereavement, with the care of two lads who were somewhat indifferent to the religion she cherished, touches our sympathies. We feel for her when she has to consent to the marriage of her sons with heathen women, for it seems to close all hope of return to her own land and, sore as this trial is, there is a deeper trouble. She is left childless in the country of exile. Yet all is not shadow. Life never is entirely dark unless with those who have ceased to trust in God and care for man. While we have compassion on Naomi

we must also admire her. An Israelite among heathen she keeps her Hebrew ways, not in bitterness but in gentle fidelity. Loving her native place more warmly than ever she so speaks of it and praises it as to make her daughters-in-law think of settling there with her. The influence of her religion is upon them both, and one at least is inspired with faith and tenderness equal to her own. Naomi has her compensations, we see. Instead of proving a trouble to her as she feared, the foreign women in her house have become her friends. She finds occupation and reward in teaching them the religion of Jehovah, and thus, so far as usefulness of the highest kind is concerned, Naomi is more blessed in Moab than she might have been in Bethlehem.

Far better the service of others in spiritual things than a life of mere personal ease and comfort. We count up our pleasures, our possessions and gains and think that in these we have the evidence of the divine favour. Do we as often reckon the opportunities given us of helping our neighbours to believe in God, of showing patience and fidelity, of having a place among those who labour and wait for the eternal kingdom? It is here that we ought to trace the gracious hand of God preparing our way, opening for us the gates of life. When shall we understand that circumstances which remove us from the experience of poverty and pain remove us also from precious means of spiritual service and profit? To be in close personal touch with the poor, the ignorant and burdened is to have simple every-day openings into the region of highest power and gladness. We do something enduring, something that engages and increases our best powers when we guide, enlighten and comfort even a few souls and plant

but a few flowers in some dull corner of the world. Naomi did not know how blest she had been in Moab. She said afterwards that she had gone out full and the Lord had brought her home again empty. She even imagined that Jehovah had testified against her and cast her from Him in rejection. Yet she had been finding the true power, winning the true riches. Did she return empty when the convert Ruth, the devoted Ruth went back with her?

Her two sons taken away, Naomi felt no tie binding her to Moab. Moreover in Judah the fields were green again and life was prosperous. She might hope to dispose of her land and realize something for her old age. It seemed therefore her interest and duty to return to her own country; and the next picture of the poem shows Naomi and her daughters-in-law travelling along the northward highway towards the ford of Jordan, she on her way home, they accompanying her. The two young widows are almost decided when they leave the desolate dwelling in Moab to go all the way to Bethlehem. Naomi's account of the life there, the purer faith and better customs attract them, and they love her well. But the matter is not settled; on the bank of Jordan the final choice will be made.

There are hours which bring a heavy burden of responsibility to those who advise and guide, and such an hour came now to Naomi. It was in poverty she was returning to the home of her youth. She could promise to her daughters-in-law no comfortable easy life there, for, as she well knew, the enmity of Hebrews against Moabites was apt to be bitter and they might be scorned as aliens from Jehovah. So far as she was concerned nothing could have been more desirable than their company. A woman in poverty and past middle life

could not wish to separate herself from young and affectionate companions who would be a help to her in her old age. To throw off the thought of personal comfort natural to one in her circumstances and look at things from an unselfish point of view was very difficult. In reading her story let us remember how apt we are to colour advice half unconsciously with our own wishes, our own seeming needs.

Naomi's advantage lay in securing the companionship of Ruth and Orpah, and religious considerations added their weight to her own desire. Her very regard and care for these young women seemed to urge as the highest service she could do them to draw them out of the paganism of Moab and settle them in the country of Jehovah. So while she herself would find reward for her patient efforts these two would be rescued from the darkness, bound in the bundle of life. Here, perhaps, was her strongest temptation; and to some it may appear that it was her duty to use every argument to this end, that she was bound as one who watched for the souls of Ruth and Orpah to set every fear, every doubt aside and to persuade them that their salvation depended on going with her to Bethlehem. Was this not her sacred opportunity, her last opportunity of making sure that the teaching she had given them should have its fruit?

Strange it may seem that the author of the Book of Ruth is not chiefly concerned with this aspect of the case, that he does not blame Naomi for failing to set spiritual considerations in the front. The narrative indeed afterwards makes it clear that Ruth chose the good part and prospered by choosing it, but here the writer calmly states without any question the very temporal and secular reasons which Naomi pressed on

the two widows. He seems to allow that home and country—though they were under the shadow of heathenism—home and country and worldly prospects were rightly taken account of even as compared with a place in Hebrew life and faith. But the underlying fact is a social pressure clearly before the Oriental mind. The customs of the time were overmastering, and women had no resource but to submit to them. Naomi accepts the facts and ordinances of the age; the inspired author has nothing to say against her.

"The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband." That the two young widows should return each to her mother's house and marry again in Moab is Naomi's urgent advice to them. The times were rude and wild. A woman could be safe and respected only under the protection of a husband. Not only was there the old-world contempt for unmarried women, but, we may say, they were an impossibility; there was no place for them in the social life. People did not see how there could be a home without some man at the head of it, the house-band in whom all family arrangements centred. It had not been strange that in Moab Hebrew men should marry women of the land; but was it likely Ruth and Orpah would find favour at Bethlehem? Their speech and manners would be despised and dislike once incurred prove hard to overcome. Besides, they had no property to commend them.

Evidently the two were very inexperienced. They had little thought of the difficulties, and Naomi, therefore, had to speak very strongly. In the grief of bereavement and the desire for a change of scene they had formed the hope of going where there were good men and women like the Hebrews they knew, and

placing themselves under the protection of the gracious God of Israel. Unless they did so life seemed practically at an end. But Naomi could not take upon herself the responsibility of letting them drift into a hazardous position, and she forced a decision of their own in full view of the facts. It was true kindness no less than wisdom. The age had not dawned in which women could attempt to shape or dare to defy the customs of society, nor was any advantage to be sought at the risk of moral compromise. These things Naomi understood, though afterwards, in extremity, she made Ruth venture unwisely to obtain a prize.

Looking around us now we see multitudes of women for whom there appears to be no room, no vocation. Up to a certain point, while they were young, they had no thought of failure. Then came a time when Providence appointed a task; there were parents to care for, daily occupations in the house. But calls for their service have ceased and they feel no responsibility sufficient to give interest and strength. The world has moved on and the movement has done much for women, yet all do not find themselves supplied with a task and a place. Around the occupied and the distinguished circles perpetually a crowd of the helpless, the aimless, the disappointed, to whom life is a blank, offering no path to a ford of Jordan and a new future. Yet half the needful work is done for these when they are made to feel that among the possible ways they must choose one for themselves and follow it; and all is done when they are shown that in the service of God, which is the service also of mankind, a task waits them fitted to engage their highest powers. Across into the region of religious faith and energy they may decide to pass, there is room in it for every life. Disappointment will

end when selfish thoughts are forgotten; helplessness will cease when the heart is resolved to help. Even to the very poor and ignorant deliverance would come with a religious thought of life and the first step in personal duty.

II.

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

RUTH i. 14-19.

WE journey along with others for a time, enjoying their fellowship and sharing their hopes, yet with thoughts and dreams of our own that must sooner or later send us on a separate path. But decision is so difficult to many that they are glad of an excuse for self-surrender and are only too willing to be led by some authority, deferring personal choice as long as possible. Let an ecclesiastic or a strong-minded companion lay down for them the law of right and wrong and point the path of duty and they will obey, welcoming the relief from moral effort. Not seeing clearly, not disciplined in judgment, they crave external human guidance. The teachers of submission find many disciples not because they speak truth but because they meet the indolence of the human will with a crutch instead of a stimulus ; they succeed by pampering weakness and making ignorance a virtue. A time comes, however, when the method will not serve. There are moments when the will must be exercised in choosing between one path and another, advance and retreat; and the alternative is too sharp to allow any escape. If the person is to live at all as a human being he has to decide whether he will go on in such

a company or turn back; he has to declare what or who has the strongest hold upon his mind. Such an occasion came to Ruth and Orpah when they reached the border of Moab.

To Orpah the arguments of Naomi were persuasive. Her mother lived in Moab, and to her mother's house she could return. There the customs prevailed which from childhood she had followed. She would have liked to go with Naomi, but her interest in the Hebrew woman and the land and law of Jehovah did not suffice to draw her forward. Orpah saw the future as Naomi painted it, not indeed very attractive if she returned to her native place, but with far more uncertainty and possible humiliation if she crossed the dividing river. She kissed Naomi and Ruth and took the southward road alone, weeping as she went, often turning for yet another sight of her friends, passing at every step into an existence that could never be the old life simply taken up again, but would be coloured in all its experience by what she had learned from Naomi and that parting which was her own choice.

The others did not greatly blame her, and we, for our part, may not reproach her. It is unnecessary to suppose that in returning to her kinsfolk and settling down to the tasks that offered in her mother's house she was guilty of despising truth and love and renouncing the best. We may reasonably imagine her henceforth bearing witness for a higher morality and affirming the goodness of the Hebrew religion among her friends and acquaintances. Ruth goes where affection and duty lead her; but for Orpah too it may be claimed that in love and duty she goes back. She is not one who says, Moab has done nothing for me; Moab has no claim upon me; I am free to leave my

country; I am under no debt to my people. We shall not take her as a type of selfishness, worldliness or backsliding, this Moabite woman. Let us rather believe that she knew of those at home who needed the help she could give, and that with the thought of least hazard to herself mingled one of the duty she owed to others.

And Ruth:—memorable for ever is her decision, charming for ever the words in which it is expressed. "Behold," said Naomi, "thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her god: return thou after thy sister-in-law." But Ruth replied, "Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." Like David's lament over Jonathan these words have sunk deep into the human heart. As an expression of the tenderest and most faithful friendship they are unrivalled. The simple dignity of the iteration in varying phrase till the climax is reached beyond which no promise could go, the quiet fervour of the feeling, the thought which seems to have almost a Christian depth—all are beautiful, pathetic, noble. From this moment a charm lingers about Ruth and she becomes dearer to us than any woman of whom the Hebrew records tell.

Dignified and warm affection is the first characteristic of Ruth and close beside it we find the strength of a firm conclusion as to duty. It is good to be capable of clear resolve, parting between this and that of opposing considerations and differing claims. Not to rush

at decisions and act in mere wilfulness, for wilfulness is the extreme of weakness, but to judge soundly and on this side or that to say, Here I see the path for me to follow: along this and no other I conclude to go. Unreason decides by taste, by momentary feeling, often out of mere spite or antipathy. But the resolve of a wise thoughtful person, even though it bring temporal disadvantage, is a moral gain, a step towards salvation. It is the exercise of individuality, of the soul.

One may act in error, as perhaps Elimelech and Orpah acted, yet the life be the stronger for the mistaken decision; only there must be no repentance for having exercised the power of judgment and of choice. Women are particularly prone to go back on themselves in false repentance. They did what they could not but think to be duty; they carefully decided on a path in loyalty to conscience; yet too often they will reproach themselves because what they desired and hoped has not come about. We cannot imagine Ruth in after years, even though her lot had remained that of the poor gleaner and labourer, returning upon her decision and weeping in secret as if the event had proved her high choice a foolish one. Her mind was too firm and clear for that. Yet this is what numbers of women are doing, burdening their souls, making that a crime in which they should rather practise themselves. Our decisions, even when they are made with all the wisdom and information we can command in thorough sanity and sincerity, may be, often are very faulty; and do we expect that Providence will perpetually interfere to bring a perfect result out of the imperfect? Only in the perfect order of God, through the perfect work of Christ and the perfect operation of the Holy Spirit is the glorious consummation of human history

and divine purpose to come. As for us, we are to learn of God in Christ, to judge and act our best; thereafter, leaving the result to Providence, never go back on that of which the Spirit of the Almighty made us capable in the hour of trial.

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"[1]

In religion there is no escape from personal decision; no one can drift to salvation with companions or with a church. In art, in literature, in ordinary morality it is possible to possess something without any special effort. The atmosphere of cultured society, for instance, holds in solution the knowledge and taste which have been gained by a few and may pass in some measure to those who associate with them, though personally these have studied and acquired very little. Any one who observes how a new book is talked of will see the process. But the supreme nature of religion and its unique part in human development are seen here, that it demands high and sustained personal effort, the constant action of the will; that indeed every spiritual gain must result from the vital activity of the individual mind choosing to enter and enter yet farther the kingdom of divine revelation and grace. As it is expressed in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience

[1] Browning: *Rabbi Ben Ezra.*

inherit the promises." The training in resoluteness, therefore, finds highest value and significance in view of the religious life. Those who live by habit and dependence in other matters are not prepared for the strenuous calling of faith, and many a one is kept from the freedom and joy of Christianity not because they are undesired, not because the call of Christ is unheeded, but for want of the power of decision, strength to go forward on a personal quest. Thousands are in the way of saying, Will you go to an evangelistic meeting? Then I will go. Will you take the Sacrament? Then I will. Will you teach in the Sunday-school? Then I will. So far something is gained: there is a half-decision. But the spiritual life is sure at some point to demand more than this. Even Naomi's advice must not deter Ruth from taking the way to Bethlehem.

Like many women Ruth was moved greatly by love. Was her love justified? Did it rightly govern her to the extent her words imply? "Whither thou goest, I will go: thy people shall be my people: where thou diest I will die, and there will I be buried." It is beautiful to see such love: but how was it earned?

Surely by years of patient faithful help; not by a few cheap words and caresses, a few facile promises; not by beauty of face, gaiety of temper. The love that has nothing but these to found upon is not enough for a life-companionship. But if there is honour, clear sincerity of soul, generosity of nature; if there is brave devotion to duty, there love can rest without fear, reproach or hazard. When these cast their light on your way, love then, love freely and strongly; you are safe. It is indeed called love where these are not—but only in ignorance and lightness: the heart has been

caught by a word, ensnared by a look. How pathetic are the errors into which we see our friends and neighbours fall, errors that call for a life-long repentance because reason and serious purpose had nothing to do with the loving. No law of God is written against human affection, nor has He any jealousy of the devotion we show to worthy fellow-creatures; but there are divine laws of love to restrain our weak fancy and uplift our emotions; and if we disdain or cast aside these laws we must suffer however ardent and self-sacrificing affection may be. Egotistical wilfulness in serving some one who engages our admiration and passionate devotion is not properly speaking love. It is rather an offence against that divine grace which bears the noble name. Of course we are not here speaking of Christian charity towards our neighbours, interest in them and care for their well-being, which are always our duty and must not be limited. The story we are following is one of an intimate and personal affection.

Lastly and chiefly the answer of Ruth implies a religious change—conversion. She renounces Chemosh and turns in faith and hope to the God of Israel, and this is the striking feature of her choice. Dimly seen, the grace and righteousness of the Most High touched her soul, commanded her reverence, drew her to follow one who was His servant and could recount the wonderful story of His people. Surely it is a supreme event in any life when this vision of the Best allures the mind and engages the will, even though knowledge of God be as yet very imperfect. And the reliance of Ruth upon the little she felt and knew of God, her clear resolution to seek rest under His wings appear in striking contrast with the reluctance, the unconcern,

the hard unfaith of many to-day. How is it that they to whom the Word speaks and the life is revealed, whose portion is at every moment enriched by that Word and that life are so blind to the grace that encompasses and deaf to the love that entreats? Again and again we see them on the banks of some Jordan, with the land of God clear in view, with the promise of devotion trembling on their lips; but they turn back to Moab and Chemosh, to paganism, unrest and despair.

Ruth's life properly began when at Naomi's side she passed through the waters, the very waters of baptism to her. There, with the purple mountains of Moab and the precipices of the Dead Sea shore behind, she sent her last look to Orpah and the past, and saw before her the steep narrow ascent through the Judæan hills. With rising faith, with growing love she moved to the fulfilment of womanhood in realizing the soul's highest power and privilege. The upward path was hard to weary feet and all was not to be easy for Ruth in the Bethlehem of which she had dreamed; but fully committed and pledged to the new life she went forward. How much is missed when the choice to serve God is not unreservedly made, and there is not that full consecration of which Ruth's decision may be a type.

Of this loss we see examples on every side. To remain in the low ground by the river, still within reach of some paganism that fascinates even after profession and baptism—this is the end of religious feeling with many. Where the narrow way of discipleship leads they will not adventure; it is too bare, confining and severe. They will not believe that freedom for the human soul is found by that path alone; they refuse

to be bound and therefore never discover the inheritance of God's children to which they are called. When He who alone can guide, quicken, redeem is accepted solemnly and finally as the Lord of life, then at last the weak and entangled spirit knows the beginning of liberty and strength. Sad is the reckoning in our time of those who refuse to pledge themselves to the Saviour Whose claim they do feel to be divine and urgent. Not yet may the preacher cease to speak of conversion as the necessity in every life. Rather because it is easy to be in touch with Christianity at some point, because gospel influences are widely diffused, and church connection can be lightly held, the personal pledge to Christ must be insisted upon in the pulpit and kept in view as the end to which all the work of the church is directed.

Life has many partings, and we have all had our experience of some which without fault on either side separate those well fitted to serve and bless each other. Over matters of faith, questions of political order and even social morality separations will occur. There may be no lack of faithfulness on either side when at a certain point widely divergent views of duty are taken by two who have been friends. One standing only a little apart from the other sees the same light reflected from a different facet of the crystal, streaming out in a different direction. As it would be altogether a mistake to say that Orpah took the way of worldly selfishness, Ruth only going in the way of duty, so it is entirely a mistake to accuse those who part with us on some question of faith or conduct and think of them as finally estranged. A little more knowledge and we would see with them or they with us. Some day they

and we shall reach the truth and agree in our conclusions. Separations there must be for a time, for as the character leans to love or justice, the mind to reasoning or emotion, there is a difference in the vision of the good for which a man should strive. And if it comes to this that the paths chosen by those who were once dear friends divide them to the end of earthly days, they should retain the recollection not so much of the single point that separated, as of the many on which there was agreement. Even though they have to fight on opposite sides it should be as those who were brothers once and shall be brothers again. Indeed, are they not brothers still, if they fight for the same Master?

Yet one difference between men reaches to the roots of life. The company of those who keep the straight way and press on towards the light have the most sorrowful recollection of some partings. They have had to leave comrades and brethren behind who despised the quest of holiness and immortality and had nothing but mockery for the Friend and Saviour of man. The shadows of estrangement falling between those who are of Christ's company are nothing compared with the dense cloud which divides them from men pledged to what is earthly and ignoble; and so the reproach of sectarian division coming from irreligious persons needs not trouble those who have as Christians an eternal brotherhood.

There are divisions sharp and dreadful, not always at some river which clearly separates land from land. They may be made in the street where parting seems temporary and casual. They may be made in the very house of God. While some members of a family are responding with joy to a divine appeal, one may

be resolutely turning from it to a base idolatry. Of three who went together to a place of prayer two may from that hour keep company in the heavenward journey, while the third moves every day towards the shadow of self-chosen reprobation. Christ has spoken of tremendous separations which men make by their acceptance or rejection of Him. "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into life eternal."

III.

IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ.

RUTH i. 19-ii. 23.

WEARY and footsore the two travellers reached Bethlehem at length, and "all the city was moved about them." Though ten years had elapsed, many yet remembered as if it had been yesterday the season of terrible famine and the departure of the emigrants. Now the women lingering at the well, when they see the strangers approaching, say as they look in the face of the elder one, "Is this Naomi?" What a change is here! With husband and sons, hoping for a new life across in Moab, she went away. Her return has about it no sign of success; she comes on foot, in the company of one who is evidently of an alien race, and the two have all the marks of poverty. The women who recognize the widow of Elimelech are somewhat pitiful, perhaps also a little scornful. They had not left their native land nor doubted the promise of Jehovah. Through the famine they had waited, and now their position contrasts very favourably with hers. Surely Naomi is far down in the world since she has made a companion of a woman of Moab. Her poverty is against the wayfarer, and to those who know not the story of her life that which shows her goodness and faithfulness appears a cause of reproach and reason of suspicion.

Is it too harsh to interpret thus the question with which Naomi is met? We are only using a key which common experience of life supplies. Do people give sincere and hearty sympathy to those who went away full and return empty, who were once in good standing and repute and come back years after to their old haunts impoverished and with strange associates? Are we not more ready to judge unfavourably in such a case than to exercise charity? The trick of hasty interpretation is common because every one desires to be on good terms with himself, and nothing is so soothing to vanity as the discovery of mistakes into which others have fallen. "All the brethren of the poor do hate him," says one who knew the Hebrews and human nature well; "how much more do his friends go far from him. He pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him." Naomi finds it so when she throws herself on the compassion of her old neighbours. They are not uninterested, they are not altogether unkind, but they feel their superiority.

And Naomi appears to accept the judgment they have formed. Very touching is the lament in which she takes her position as one whom God has rebuked, whom it is no wonder, therefore, that old friends despise. She almost makes excuse for those who look down upon her from the high ground of their imaginary virtue and wisdom. Indeed she has the same belief as they that poverty, the loss of land, bereavement and every kind of affliction are marks of God's displeasure. For, what does she say? "Call me not Naomi, Pleasant, call me Mara, Bitter, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. . . . The Lord hath testified against me and the Almighty hath afflicted me." Such was the Hebrew thought, the purpose of God in

His dealings with men not being apprehended. Under the shadow of loss and sorrow it seemed that no heat of the Divine Presence could be felt. To have a husband and children appeared to Naomi evidence of God's favour; to lose them was a proof that He had turned against her. Heavy as her losses had been the terrible thing was that they implied the displeasure of God.

It is perhaps difficult for us to realize even by an imaginative effort this condition of soul—the sense of banishment, darkness, outlawry which came to the Hebrew whenever he fell into distress or penury. And yet we ourselves retain the same standard of judgment in our common estimate of life; we still interpret things by an ignorant unbelief which causes many worthy souls to bow in a humiliation Christians should never feel. Do not the loneliness, the poverty, the testimony of Christ teach us something altogether different? Can we still cherish the notion that prosperity is an evidence of worth and that the man who can found a family must be a favourite of the heavenly powers? Judge thus and the providence of God is a tangle, a perplexing darkening problem which, believe as you may, must still overwhelm. Wealth has its conditions; money comes through some one's cleverness in work and trading, some one's inventiveness or thrift, and these qualities are reputable. But nothing is proved regarding the spiritual tone and nature of a life either by wealth or by the want of it. And surely we have learned that loss of friends and loneliness are not to be reckoned the punishment of sin. Often enough we hear the warning that wealth and worldly position are not to be sought for themselves, and yet, side by side with this warning, the implication that a high place and a prosperous life are proofs of divine blessing.

On the whole subject Christian thought is far from clear, and we have need to go anew to the Master and inquire of Him Who had no place where to lay His head. The Hebrew belief in the prosperity of God's servants must fulfil itself in a larger better faith or the man of to-morrow will have no faith at all. One who bewails the loss of wealth or friends is doing nothing that has spiritual meaning or value. When he takes himself to task for that despondency he begins to touch the spiritual.

In Bethlehem Naomi found the half-ruined cottage still belonging to her, and there she and Ruth took up their abode. But for a living what was to be done? The answer came in the proposal of Ruth to go into the fields where the barley harvest was proceeding and glean after the reapers. By great diligence she might gather enough day by day for the bare sustenance that contents a Syrian peasant, and afterwards some other means of providing for herself and Naomi might be found. The work was not dignified. She would have to appear among the waifs and wanderers of the country, with women whose behaviour exposed them to the rude gibes of the labourers. But whatever plan Naomi vaguely entertained was hanging in abeyance, and the circumstances of the women were urgent. No kinsman came forward to help them. Loath as she was to expose Ruth to the trials of the harvest-field, Naomi had to let her go. So it was Ruth who made the first move, Ruth the stranger who brought succour to the Hebrew widow when her own people held aloof and she herself knew not how to act.

Now among the farmers whose barley was falling before the sickle was the land-owner Boaz, a kinsman of Elimelech, a man of substance and social importance,

one of those who in the midst of their fruitful fields shine with bountiful good-humour and by their presence make their servants work heartily. To Ruth in after days it must have seemed a wonderful thing that her first timid expedition led her to a portion of ground belonging to this man. From the moment he appears in the narrative we note in him a certain largeness of character. It may be only the easy kindness of the prosperous man, but it commends him to our good opinion. Those who have a smooth way through the world are bound to be especially kind and considerate in their bearing toward neighbours and dependants, this at least they owe as an acknowledgment to the rest of the world, and we are always pleased to find a rich man paying his debt so far. There is a certain piety also in the greeting of Boaz to his labourers, a customary thing no doubt and good even in that sense, but better when it carries, as it seems to do here, a personal and friendly message. Here is a man who will observe with strict eye everything that goes on in the field and will be quick to challenge any lazy reaper. But he is not remote from those who serve him, he and they meet on common ground of humanity and faith.

The great operations which some in these days think fit to carry on, more for their own glory certainly than the good of their country or countrymen, entirely preclude anything like friendship between the chief and the multitude of his subordinates. It is impossible that a man who has a thousand under him should know and consider each, and there would be too much pretence in saying, "God be with you," on entering a yard or factory when otherwise no feeling is shown with which the name of God can be connected. Apart altogether from questions as to wealth and its use

every employer has a responsibility for maintaining the healthy human activity of his people, and nowhere is the immorality of the present system of huge concerns so evident as in the extinction of personal good will. The workman of course may adjust himself to the state of matters, but it will too often be by discrediting what he knows he cannot have and keeping up a critical resentful habit of mind against those who seem to treat him as a machine. He may often be wrong in his judgment of an employer. There may be less hardness of temper on the other side than there is on his own. But, the conditions being what they are, one may say he is certain to be a severe critic. We have unquestionably lost much and are in danger of losing more, not in a financial sense, which matters little, but in the infinitely more important affairs of social sweetness and Christian civilization.

Boaz the farmer had not more in hand than he could attend to honestly, and everything under his care was well ordered. He had a foreman over the reapers, and from him he required an account of the stranger whom he saw gleaning in the field. There were to be no hangers-on of loose character where he exercised authority; and in this we justify him. We like to see a man keeping a firm hand when we are sure that he has a good heart and knows what he is doing. Such a one is bound within the range of his power to have all done rightly and honourably, and Boaz pleases us all the better that he makes close inquiry regarding the woman who seeks the poor gains of a common gleaner.

Of course in a place like Bethlehem people knew each other, and Boaz was probably acquainted with most whom he saw about; at once, therefore, the new figure of the Moabite woman attracted his attention.

Who is she? A kindly heart prompts the inquiry for the farmer knows that if he interests himself in this young woman he may be burdened with a new dependant. "It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab." She is the daughter-in-law of his old friend Elimelech. Before the eyes of Boaz one of the romances of life, common and tragic too, is unfolding itself. Often had Boaz and Elimelech held counsel with each other, met at each other's houses, talked together of their fields or of the state of the country. But Elimelech went away and lost all and died; and two widows, the wreck of the family, had returned to Bethlehem. It was plain that these would be new claimants on his favour, but unlike many well-to-do persons Boaz does not wait for some urgent appeal; he acts rather as one who is glad to do a kindness for old friendship's sake.

Great was the surprise of the lonely gleaner when the rich man came to her side and gave her a word of comfortable greeting. "Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, but abide here fast by my maidens." Nothing had been done to make Ruth feel at home in Bethlehem until Boaz addressed her. She had perhaps seen proud and scornful looks in the street and at the well, and had to bear them meekly, silently. In the fields she may have looked for something of the kind and even feared that Boaz would dismiss her. A gentle person in such circumstances is exceedingly grateful for a very small kindness, and it was not a slight favour that Boaz did her. But in making her acknowledgments Ruth did not know what had prepared her way. The truth was that she had met with a man of character who valued character, and her faithfulness commended her. "It hath been fully

showed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband." The best point in Boaz is that he so quickly and fully recognises the goodness of another and will help her because they stand upon a common ground of conscience and duty.

Is it on such a ground you draw to others? Is your interest won by kindly dispositions and fidelity of temper? Do you love those who are sincere and patient in their duties, content to serve where service is appointed by God? Are you attracted by one who cherishes a parent, say a poor mother, in the time of feebleness and old age, doing all that is possible to smooth her path and provide for her comfort? Or have you little esteem for such a one, for the duties so faithfully discharged, because you see no brilliance or beauty, and there are other persons more clever and successful on their own account, more amusing because they are unburdened? If so, be sure of your own ignorance, your own undutifulness, your own want of principle and heart. Character is known by character, and worth by worth. Those who are acquainted with you could probably say that you care more for display than for honour, that you think more of making a fine figure in society than of showing generosity, forbearance and integrity at home. The good appreciate goodness, the true honour truth. One important lesson of the Book of Ruth lies here, that the great thing for young women, and for young men also, is to be quietly faithful in the service, however humble, to which God has called them and the family circle in which He has set them. Not indeed because that is the line of promotion, though Ruth found it so; every Ruth does not obtain favour in the eyes of a wealthy Boaz. So honourable and good a man is not to be met on every

harvest field; on the contrary she may encounter a Nabal, one who is churlish and evil in his doings.

We must take the course of this narrative as symbolic. The book has in it the strain of a religious idyl. The Moabite who wins the regard of this man of Judah represents those who, though naturally strangers to the covenant of promise, receive the grace of God and enter the circle of divine blessing—even coming to high dignity in the generations of the chosen people. It is idyllic, we say, not an exhibition of every-day fact; yet the course of divine justice is surely more beautiful, more certain. To every Ruth comes the Heavenly Friend Whose are all the pastures and fields, all the good things of life. The Christian hope is in One Who cannot fail to mark the most private faithfulness, piety and love hidden like violets among the grass. If there is not such a One, the Helper and Vindicator of meek fidelity, virtue has no sanction and well-doing no recompense.

The true Israelite Boaz accepts the daughter of an alien and unfriendly people on account of her own character and piety. "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord, the God of Israel, under Whose wings thou art come to take refuge." Such is the benediction which Boaz invokes on Ruth, receiving her cordially into the family circle of Jehovah. Already she has ceased to be a stranger and a foreigner to him. The boundary walls of race are overstepped, partly, no doubt, by that sense of kinship which the Bethlehemite is quick to acknowledge. For Naomi's sake and for Elimelech's as well as her own he craves divine protection and reward for the daughter of Moab. Yet the beautiful phrase he employs, full of Hebrew confidence in God, is an acknowledg-

ment of Ruth's act of faith and her personal right to share with the children of Abraham the fostering love of the Almighty. The story, then, is a plea against that exclusiveness which the Hebrews too often indulged. On this page of the annals the truth is written out that though Jehovah cared for Israel much He cares still more for love and faithfulness, purity and goodness. We reach at last an instance of that fulfilment of Israel's mission to the nations around which in our study of the Book of Judges we looked for in vain.

Not for Israel only in the time of its narrowness was the lesson given. We need it still. The justification and redemption of God are not restricted to those who have certain traditions and beliefs. Even as a Moabite woman brought up in the worship of Chemosh, with many heathen ideas still in her mind, has her place under the wings of Jehovah as a soul seeking righteousness, so from countries and regions of life which Christian people may consider a kind of rude heathen Moab many in humility and sincerity may be coming nigh to the kingdom of God. It was so in our Lord's time, and it is so still. All along the true religion of God has been for reconciliation and brotherhood among men, and it was possible for many Israelites to do what Naomi did in the way of making effectual the promise of God to Abraham that in his seed all families of the earth should be blessed. There never was a middle wall of partition between men except in the thought of the Hebrew. He was separated that he might be able to convert and bless, not that he might stand aloof in pride. The wall which he built Christ has broken down that the servants of His gospel may go freely forth to find everywhere brethren in common

humanity and need, who are to be made brethren in Christ. The outward representation of brotherhood in faith must follow the work of the reconciling Spirit—cannot precede it. And when the reconciliation is felt in the depth of human souls we shall have the all-comprehensive church, a fair and gracious dwelling-place, wide as the race, rich with every noble thought and hope of man and every gift of Heaven.

IV.

THE HAZARDOUS PLAN.

RUTH iii.

HOPE came to Naomi when Ruth returned with the ephah of barley and her story of the rich man's hearty greeting. God was remembering His handmaiden; He had not shut up His tender mercies. Through His favour Boaz had been moved to kindness, and the house of Elimelech would yet be raised from the dust. The woman's heart, clinging to its last hope, was encouraged. Naomi was loud in her praises of Jehovah and of the man who had with such pious readiness befriended Ruth. And the young woman had due encouragement. She heard no fault-finding, no complaint that she had made too little of her chance. The young sometimes find it difficult to serve the old, and those who have come down in the world are very apt to be discontented and querulous; what is done for them is never rightly done, never enough. It was not so here. The elder woman seems to have had nothing but gratitude for the gentle effort of the other. And so the weeks of barley-harvest and of wheat-harvest went by, Ruth busy in the fields of Boaz, gleaning behind his maidens, helped by their kindness—for they knew better than to thwart their master—and cheered at home by the pleasure of her mother-in-law. An idyl? Yes: one that might be enacted, with varying circum-

stances, in a thousand homes where at present distrust and impatience keep souls from the peace God would give them.

But, one may ask, why did Boaz, so well inclined to be generous, knowing these women to be deserving of help, leave them week after week without further notice and aid? Could he reckon his duty done when he allowed Ruth to glean in his fields, gave her a share of the refreshment provided for the reapers, and ordered them to pull some ears from the bundles that she might the more easily fill her arms? For friendship's sake even, should he not have done more?

We keep in mind, for one thing, that Boaz, though a kinsman, was not the nearest relation Naomi had in Bethlehem. Another was of closer kin to Elimelech, and it was his duty to take up the widow's case in accordance with the custom of the time. The old law that no Hebrew family should be allowed to lapse had deep root and justification. How could Israel maintain itself in the land of promise and become the testifying people of God if families were suffered to die out and homesteads to be lost? One war after another drained away many active men of the tribes. Upon those who survived lay the serious duty of protecting widows, upholding claims to farm and dwelling and raising up to those who had died a name in Israel. The stress of the time gave sanction to the law; without it Israel would have decayed, losing ground and power in the face of the enemy. Now this custom bound the nearest kinsman of Naomi to befriend her and, at least, to establish her claim to a certain "parcel of land" near Bethlehem. As for Boaz, he had to stand aside and give the goël his opportunity.

And another reason is easily seen for his not hastening

to supply the two widows with every comfort and remove from their hearts every fear, a reason which touches the great difficulty of the philanthropic,—how to do good and yet do no harm. To give is easy; but to help without tarnishing the fine independence and noble thrift of poorer persons is not easy. It is, in truth, a very serious matter to use wealth wisely, for against the absolute duty of help hangs the serious mischief that may result from lavish or careless charity. Boaz appears a true friend and wise benefactor in leaving Ruth to enjoy the sweetness of securing the daily portion of corn by her own exertion. He might have relieved her from toiling like one of the poorest and least cared for of women. He might have sent her home the first day and one of his young men after her with store of corn and oil. But if he had done so he would have made the great mistake so often made now-a-days by the bountiful. An industrious patient generous life would have been spoiled. To protect Ruth from any kind or degree of insolence, to show her, for his own part, the most delicate respect—this Boaz could well do. In what he refrained from doing he is an example, and in the kind and measure of attention he paid to Ruth. Corresponding acts of Christian courtesy and justice due from the rich and influential of our time to persons in straitened circumstances are far too often unrendered. A thousand opportunities of paying this real debt of man to man are allowed to pass. Those concerned do not see any obligation, and the reason is that they want the proper state of mind. That is indispensable. Where it exists true neighbourliness will follow; the best help will be given naturally with perfect taste, in proper degree and without self-sufficiency or pride.

A great hazard goes with much of the spiritual work of our time. The Ruth gleaning for herself in the field of Christian thought, finding here and there an ear of heavenly corn which, as she has gathered it, gives true nourishment to the soul—is met not by one but by many eager to save her all the trouble of searching the Scriptures and thinking out the problems of life and faith. Is it wrong to deprive a brave self-helper of the need to toil for daily bread? How much greater is the wrong done to minds capable of spiritual endeavour when they are taught to renounce personal effort and are loaded with sheaves of corn which they have neither sowed nor reaped. The fashion of our time is to save people trouble in religion, to remove all resistance from the way of mind and soul, and as a result the spiritual life never attains strength or even consciousness. Better the scanty meal won by personal search in the great harvest field than the surfeit of dainties on which some are fed, spiritual paupers though they know it not. The wisdom of the Divine Book is marvellously shown in that it gives largely without destroying the need for effort, that it requires examination and research, comparison of scripture with scripture, earnest thought in many a field. Bible study, therefore, makes strong Christians, strong faith.

As time went by and harvest drew to a close, Naomi grew impatient. Anxious about Ruth's future she wished to see something done towards establishing her in safety and honour. "My daughter-in-law," we hear her say, "shall I not seek rest—a *menuchah* or asylum for thee, that it may be well with thee?" No goël or redeemer has appeared to befriend Naomi and reistnate her, or Ruth as representing her dead son, in the rights of Elimelech. If those rights are not to lapse, some-

thing must be done speedily; and Naomi's plot is a bold one. She sets Ruth to claim Boaz as the kinsman whose duty it is to marry her and become her protector. Ruth is to go to the threshing-floor on the night of the harvest festival, wait until Boaz lies down to sleep beside the mass of winnowed grain, and place herself at his feet, so reminding him that if no other will it is his part to be a husband to her for the sake of Elimelech and his sons. The plan is daring and appears to us indelicate at least. It is impossible to say whether any custom of the time sanctioned it; but even in that case we cannot acquit Naomi of resorting to a stratagem with the view of bringing about what seemed most desirable for Ruth and herself.

Now let us remember the position of the two widows, lonely, with no prospect before them but hard toil that would by-and-by fail, unable to undertake anything on their own account, and still regarded with indifference if not suspicion by the people of Bethlehem. There is no asylum for Ruth except in the house of a husband. If Naomi dies she will be worse than destitute, morally under a cloud. To live by herself will be to lead a life of constant peril. It is, we may say, a desperate resource on which Naomi falls. Boaz is probably already married, has perhaps more wives than one. True, he has room in his house for Ruth; he can easily provide for her; and though the customs of the age are strained somewhat we must partly admit excuse. Still the venture is almost entirely suggested and urged by worldly considerations, and for the sake of them great risk is run. Instead of gaining a husband Ruth may completely forfeit respect. Boaz, so far from entertaining her appeal to his kinship and generosity, may drive her from the threshing-floor. It is one

of those cases in which, notwithstanding some possible defence in custom, poverty and anxiety lead into dubious ways.

We ask why Naomi did not first approach the proper goël, the kinsman nearer than Boaz, on whom she had an undeniable claim. And the answer occurs that he did not seem in respect of disposition or means so good a match as Boaz. Or why did she not go directly to Boaz and state her desire? She was apparently not averse from grasping at the result, compromising him, or running the risk of doing so in order to gain her end. We cannot pass the point without observing that, despite the happy issue of this plot, it is a warning not an example. These secret, underhand schemes are not to our liking; they should in no circumstances be resorted to. It was well for Ruth that she had a man to deal with who was generous, not irascible, a man of character who had fully appreciated her goodness. The scheme would otherwise have had a pitiful result. The story is one creditable in many respects to human nature, and the Moabite acting under Naomi's direction appears almost blameless; yet the sense of having lowered herself must have cast its shadow. A risk was run too great by far for modesty and honour.

To compromise ourselves by doing that which savours of presumption, which goes too far even by a hair's-breadth in urging a claim is a bad thing. Better remain without what we reckon our rights than lower our moral dignity in pressing them. Independence of character, perfect honour and uprightness are too precious by far to be imperilled even in a time of serious difficulty. To-day we can hardly turn in any direction without seeing instances of risky compromise often ending in disaster. To obtain preferment one will

offer some mean bribe of flattery to the person who can give it. To gain a fortune men will condescend to pitiful self-humiliation. In the literary world the upward ways open easily to talent that does not refuse compromises; a writer may have success at the price of astute silence or careful caressing of prejudice. The candidate for office commits himself and has afterwards to wriggle as best he can out of the straits in which he is involved. And what is the meaning of the light judgment of drunkenness and impurity by men and women of all ranks who associate with those known to be guilty and make no protest against their wrong-doing?

It would be shirking one of the plain applications of the incidents before us if we passed over the compromises so many women make with self-respect and purity. Ruth, under the advice of one whom she knew to be a good woman, risked something: with us now are many who against the entreaty of all true friends adventure into dangerous ways, put themselves into the power of men they have no reason to trust. And women in high place, who should set an example of fidelity to the divine order and understand the honour of womanhood, are rather leading the dance of freedom and risk. To keep a position or win a position in the crowd called society some will yield to any fashion, go all lengths in the license of amusement, sit unblushing at plays that serve only one end, give themselves and their daughters to embraces that degrade. The struggle to live is spoken of sometimes as an excuse for women. But is it the very poor only who compromise themselves? Something else is going on beside the struggle to find work and bread. People are forgetting God, thrusting aside the ideas of the soul

and of sin; they want keen delight and are ready to venture all if only in triumphant ambition or on the perilous edge of infamy they can satisfy desire for an hour. The cry of to-day, spreading down through all ranks, is the old one, Why should we be righteous over much and destroy ourselves?· It is the expression of a base and despicable atheism. To deny the higher light which shows the way of personal duty and nobleness, to prefer instead the miserable rushlight of desire is the fatal choice against which all wisdom of sage and seer testifies. Yet the thing is done daily, done by brilliant women who go on as if nothing was wrong and laugh back to those who follow them. The Divine Friend of women protests, but His words are unheard, drowned by the fascinating music and quick pulsation of the dance of death.

To compromise ourselves is bad: close beside lies the danger of compromising others; and this too is illustrated by the narrative. Boaz acted in generosity and honour, told Ruth plainly that a kinsman nearer than himself stood between them, made her a most favourable promise. But he sent her away in the early morning "before one could recognise another." The risk to which she had exposed him was one he did not care to face. While he made all possible excuses for her and was in a sense proud of the trust she had reposed in him, still he was somewhat alarmed and anxious. The narrative is generous to Ruth; but this is not concealed. We see very distinctly a touch of something caught in heathen Moab.

On the more satisfactory side of the picture is the confidence so unreservedly exercised, justified so thoroughly. It is good to be among people who deserve trust and never fail in the time of trial. Take them at

any hour, in any way they are the same. Incapable of baseness they bear every test. On the firm conviction that Boaz was a man of this kind Naomi depended, upon this and an assurance equally firm that Ruth would behave herself discreetly. Happy indeed are those who have the honour of friendship with the honourable and true, with men who would rather lose a right hand than do anything base, with women who would die for honour's sake. To have acquaintance with faithful men is to have a way prepared for faith in God.

Let us not fail, however, to observe where honour like this may be found, where alone it is to be found. Common is the belief that absolute fidelity may exist in soil cleared of all religious principle. You meet people who declare that religion is of no use. They have been brought up in religion, but they are tired of it. They have given up churches and prayers and are going to be honourable without thought of God, on the basis of their own steadfast virtue. We shall not say it is impossible, or that women like Ruth may not rely upon men who so speak. But a single word of scorn cast on religion reveals so faulty a character that it is better not to confide in the man who utters it. He is in the real sense an atheist, one to whom nothing is sacred. About some duties he may have a sentiment; but what is sentiment or taste to build upon? For one to trust where reputation is concerned, where moral well-being is involved a soul must be found whose life is rooted in the faith of God. True enough, we are under the necessity of trusting persons for whom we have no such guarantee. Fortunately, however, it is only in matters of business, or municipal affairs, or parliamentary votes, things extraneous to our

proper life. Unrighteous laws may be made, we may be defrauded and oppressed, but that does not affect our spiritual position. When it comes to the soul and the soul's life, when one is in search of a wife, a husband, a friend, trust should be placed elsewhere, hope built on a sure foundation.

May we depend upon love in the absence of religious faith? Some would fain conjure with that word; but love is a divine gift when it is pure and true; the rest is mere desire and passion. Do you suppose because an insincere worldly man has a selfish passion for you that you can be safe with him? Do you think because a worldly woman loves you in a worldly way that your soul and your future will be safe with her? Find a fearer of God, one whose virtues are rooted where alone they can grow, in faith, or live without a wife, a husband. It is presupposed that you yourself are a fearer of God, a servant of Christ. For, unless you are, the rule operates on the other side and you are one who should be shunned. Besides, if you are a materialist living in time and sense and yet look for spiritual graces and superhuman fidelity, your expectation is amazing, your hope a thing to wonder at.

True, hypocrites exist, and we may be deceived just because of our certainty that religion is the only root of faithfulness. A man may simulate religion and deceive for a time. The young may be sadly deluded, a whole community betrayed by one who makes the divinest facts of human nature serve his own wickedness awhile. He disappears and leaves behind him broken hearts, shattered hopes, darkened lives. Has religion, then, nothing to do with morality? The very ruin we lament shows that the human heart in its depth testifies to an intimate and eternal connection with the

absolute of fidelity. Not otherwise could that hypocrite have deceived. And in the strength of faith there are men and women of unflinching honour, who, when they find each other out, form rare and beautiful alliances. Step for step they go on, married or unmarried, each cheering the other in trial, sustaining the other in every high and generous task. Together they enter more deeply into the purpose of life, that is the will of God, and fill with strong and healthy religion the circle of their influence.

Of the people of ordinary virtue what shall be said? —those who are neither perfectly faithful nor disgracefully unfaithful, neither certain to be staunch and true nor ready to betray and cast aside those who trust them. Large is the class of men whose individuality is not of a moral kind, affable and easy, brisk and clever but not resolute in truth and right. Are we to leave these where they are? If we belong to their number are we to stay among them? Must they get on as best they can with each other, neither blessed nor condemned? For them the gospel is provided in its depth and urgency. Theirs is the state it cannot tolerate nor leave untouched, unaffected. If earth is good enough for you, so runs the divine message to them, cling to it, enjoy its dainties, laugh in its sunlight —and die with it. But if you see the excellence of truth, be true; if you hear the voice of the eternal Christ, arise and follow Him, born again by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever.

V.

THE MARRIAGE AT THE GATE

RUTH iv

A SIMPLE ceremony of Oriental life brings to a climax the history which itself closes in sweet music the stormy drama of the Book of Judges. With all the literary skill and moral delicacy, all the charm and keen judgment of inspiration the narrator gives us what he has from the Spirit. He has represented with fine brevity and power of touch the old life and custom of Israel, the private groups in which piety and faithfulness were treasured, the frank humanity and divine seriousness of Jehovah's covenant. And now we are at the gate of Bethlehem where the head men are assembled and according to the usage of the time the affairs of Naomi and Ruth are settled by the village court of justice. Boaz gives a challenge to the goël of Naomi, and point by point we follow the legal forms by which the right to redeem the land of Elimelech is given up to Boaz and Ruth becomes his wife.

Why is an old custom presented with such minuteness? We may affirm the underlying suggestion to be that the ways described were good ways which ought to be kept in mind. The usage implied great openness and neighbourliness, a simple and straightforward method of arranging affairs which were of moment to

a community. People lived then in very direct and frank relations with each other. Their little town and its concerns had close and intelligent attention. Men and women desired to act so that there might be good understanding among them, no jealousy nor rancour of feeling. Elaborate forms of law were unknown, unnecessary. To take off the shoe and hand it to another in the presence of honest neighbours ratified a decision as well and gave as good security as much writing on parchment. The author of the Book of Ruth commends these homely ways of a past age and suggests to the men of his own time that civilization and the monarchy, while they have brought some gains, are perhaps to be blamed for the decay of simplicity and friendliness.

More than one reason may be found for supposing the book to have been written in Solomon's time, probably the latter part of his reign when laws and ordinances had multiplied and were being enforced in endless detail by a central authority; when the manners of the nations around, Chaldea, Egypt, Phœnicia, were overbearing the primitive ways of Israel; when luxury was growing, society dividing into classes and a proud imperialism giving its colour to habit and religion. If we place the book at this period we can understand the moral purpose of the writer and the importance of his work. He would teach people to maintain the spirit of Israel's past, the brotherliness, the fidelity in every relation that were to have been all along a distinction of Hebrew life because inseparably connected with the obedience of Jehovah. The splendid temple on Moriah was now the centre of a great priestly system, and from temple and palace the national and, to a great extent, the personal life of all Israelites was largely influenced,

not in every respect for good. The quiet suggestion is here made that the artificiality and pomp of the kingdom did not compare well with that old time when the affairs of an ancestress of the splendid monarch were settled by a gathering at a village gate.

Nor is the lesson without its value now. We are not to go back on the past in mere antiquarian curiosity, the interest of secular research. Labour which goes to revive the story of mankind in remote ages has its value only when it is applied to the uses of the moralist and the prophet. We have much to learn again that has been forgotten, much to recall that has escaped the memory of the race. Through phases of complex civilization in which the outward and sensuous are pursued the world has to pass to a new era of more simple and yet more profound life, to a social order fitted for the development of spiritual power and grace. And the church is well directed by the Book of God. Her inquiry into the past is no affair of intellectual curiosity, but a research governed by the principles that have underlain man's life from the first and a growing apprehension of all that is at stake in the multiform energy of the present. Amid the bustle and pressure of those endeavours which Christian faith itself may induce our minds become confused. Thinkers and doers are alike apt to forget the deliverances knowledge ought to effect, and while they learn and attempt much they are rather passing into bondage than finding life. Our research seems more and more to occupy us with the manner of things, and even Bible Archæology is exposed to this reproach. As for the scientific comparers of religion they are mostly feeding the vanity of the age with a sense of extraordinary progress and enlightenment, and themselves are occasionally heard to

confess that the farther they go in study of old faiths, old rituals and moralities the less profit they find, the less hint of a design. No such futility, no failure of culture and inquiry mark the Bible writers' dealing with the past. To the humble life of the Son of Man on earth, to the life of the Hebrews long before He appeared our thought is carried back from the thousand objects that fascinate in the world of to-day. And there we see the faith and all the elements of spiritual vitality of which our own belief and hope are the fruit. There too without those cumbrous modern involutions which never become familiar, society wonderfully fulfils its end in regulating personal effort and helping the conscience and the soul.

The scene at the gate shows Boaz energetically conducting the case he has taken up. Private considerations urged him to bring rapidly to an issue the affairs of Naomi and Ruth since he was involved, and again he commends himself as a man who, having a task in hand, does it with his might. His pledge to Ruth was a pledge also to his own conscience that no suspense should be due to any carelessness of his; and in this he proved himself a pattern friend. The great man often shows his greatness by making others wait at his door. They are left to find the level of their insignificance and learn the value of his favour. So the grace of God is frustrated by those who have the opportunity and should covet the honour of being His instruments. Men know that they should wait patiently on God's time, but they are bewildered when they have to wait on the strange arrogance of those in whose hands Providence has placed the means of their succour. And many must be the cases in which this fault of man

begets bitterness, distrust of God and even despair. It should be a matter of anxiety to us all to do with speed and care anything on which the hopes of the humble and needy rest. A soul more worthy than our own may languish in darkness while a promise which should have been sacred is allowed to fade from our memory.

Boaz was also open and straightforward in his transactions. His own wish is pretty clear. He seems as anxious as Naomi herself that to him should fall the duty of redeeming her burdened inheritance and reviving her husband's name. Possibly without any public discussion, by consulting with the nearer kinsman and urging his own wish or superior ability he might have settled the affair. Other inducements failing, the offer of a sum of money might have secured to him the right of redemption. But in the light of honour, in the court of his conscience, the man was unable thus to seek his end; and besides the town's people had to be considered; their sense of justice had to be satisfied as well as his own.

Often it is not enough that we do a thing from the best of motives; we must do it in the best way, for the support of justice or purity or truth. While private benevolence is one of the finest of arts, the Christian is not unfrequently called to exercise another which is more difficult and not less needful in society. Required at one hour not to let his left hand know what his right hand doeth, at another he is required in all modesty and simplicity to take his fellows to witness that he acts for righteousness, that he is contending for some thought of Christ's, that he is not standing in the outer court among those who are ashamed but has taken his place with the Master at the judgment bar of the world. Again, when a matter in which a Christian is

involved is before the public and has provoked a good deal of discussion and perhaps no little criticism of religion and its professors it is not enough that out of sight, out of court some arrangement be made which counts for a moral settlement. That is not enough though a person whose rights and character are affected may consent to it. If still the world has reason to question whether justice has been done,—justice has not been done. If still the truthfulness of the church is under valid suspicion,—the church is not manifesting Christ as it should. For no moral cause once opened at public assize can be issued in private. It is no longer between one man and another, nor between a man and the church. The conscience of the race has been empanelled and cannot be discharged without judgment. Innumerable causes withdrawn from court, compromised, hushed up or settled in corners with an effort at justice still shadow the history of the church and cast a darkness of justifiable suspicion on the path along which she would advance.

Even in this little affair at Bethlehem the good man will have everything done with perfect openness and honour and will stand by the result whether it meet his hopes or disappoint them. At the town-gate, the common meeting-place for conversation and business, Boaz takes his seat and invites the goël to sit beside him and also a jury of ten elders. The court thus constituted, he states the case of Naomi and her desire to sell a parcel of land which belonged to her husband. When Elimelech left Bethlehem he had, no doubt, borrowed money on the field, and now the question is whether the nearest kinsman will pay the debt and beyond that the further value of the land so that the widow may have something to herself. Promptly the

goël answers that he is ready to buy the land. This, however, is not all. In buying the field and adding it to his estate will the man take Ruth to wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance? He is not prepared to do that, for the children of Ruth would be entitled to the portion of ground and he is unwilling to impoverish his own family. "I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar my own inheritance." He draws off his shoe and gives it to Boaz renouncing his right of redemption.

Now this marriage-custom is not ours, but at the time, as we have seen, it was a sacred rule, and the goël was morally bound by it. He could have insisted on redeeming the land as his right. To do so was therefore his duty, and to a certain extent he failed from the ideal of a kinsman's obligation. But the position was not an easy one. Surely the man was justified in considering the children he already had and their claims upon him. Did he not exercise a wise prudence in refusing to undertake a new obligation? Moreover the circumstances were delicate and dispeace might have been caused in his household if he took the Moabite woman. It is certainly one of those cases in which a custom or law has great weight and yet creates no little difficulty, moral as well as pecuniary, in the observance. A man honest enough and not ungenerous may find it hard to determine on which side duty lies. Without, however, abusing this goël we may fairly take him as a type of those who are more impressed by the prudential view of their circumstances than by the duties of kinship and hospitality. If in the course of providence we have to decide whether we will admit some new inmate to our home worldly considerations must not rule either on the one side or the other.

A man's duty to his family, what is it? To exclude a needy dependant however pressing the claim may be? To admit one freely who has the recommendation of wealth? Such earthly calculation is no rule for a true man. The moral duty, the moral result are always to be the main elements of decision. No family ever gains by relief from an obligation conscience acknowledges. No family loses by the fulfilment of duty, whatever the expense. In household debate the balance too often turns not on the character of Ruth but on her lack of gear. The same woman who is refused as a heathen when she is poor, is discovered to be a most desirable relation if she brings fuel for the fire of welcome. Let our decisions be quite clear of this mean hypocrisy. Would we insist on being dutiful to a rich relation? Then the duty remains to him and his if they fall into poverty, for a moral claim cannot be altered by the state of the purse.

And what of the duty to Christ, His church, His poor? Would to God some people were afraid to leave their children wealthy, were afraid of having God inquire for His portion. A shadow rests on the inheritance that has been guarded in selfish pride against the just claims of man, in defiance of the law of Christ. Yet let one be sure that his liberality is not mixed with a carnal hope. What do we think of when we declare that God's recompense to those who give freely comes in added store of earthly treasure, the tithe returned ten and twenty and a hundred fold? By what law of the material or spiritual world does this come about? Certainly we love a generous man, and the liberal shall stand by liberal things. But surely God's purpose is to make us comprehend that His grace does not

take the form of a percentage on investments. When a man grows spiritually, when although he becomes poorer he yet advances to nobler manhood, to power and joy in Christ—this is the reward of Christian generosity and faithfulness. Let us be done with religious materialism, with expecting our God to repay us in the coin of this earth for our service in the heavenly kingdom.

The marriage of Ruth at which we now arrive appears at once as the happy termination of Naomi's solicitude for her, the partial reward of her own faithfulness and the solution so far as she was concerned of the problem of woman's destiny. The idea of the spiritual completion of life for woman as well as man, of the woman being able to attain a personal standing of her own with individual responsibility and freedom was not fully present to the Hebrew mind. If unmarried, Ruth would have remained, as Naomi well knew and had all along said, without a place in society, without an asylum or shelter. This old-world view of things burdens the whole history, and before passing on we must compare it with the state of modern thought on the question.

The incompleteness of the childless widow's life which is an element of this narrative, the incompleteness of the life of every unmarried woman which appears in the lament for Jephthah's daughter and elsewhere in the Bible as well as in other records of the ancient world had, we may say, a two-fold cause. On the one hand there was the obvious fact that marriage has a reason in physical constitution and the order of human society. On the other hand heathen practices and constant wars made it, as we have seen, impossible for women to establish themselves alone. A woman

needed protection, or as the law of England has it, coverture. In very exceptional cases only could the opportunity be found, even among the people of Jehovah, for those personal efforts and acts which give a position in the world. But the distinction of Israel's custom and law as compared with those of many nations lay here, that woman was recognized as entitled to a place of her own side by side with man in the social scheme. The conception of her individuality as of individuality generally was limited. The idea of what is now called the social organism governed family life, and the very faith that was afterwards to become the strength of individuality was held as a national thing. The view of complete life had no clear extension into the future, even the salvation of the soul did not appear as a distinct provision for personal immortality. Under these limitations, however, the proper life of every woman and her place in the nation were acknowledged and provision was made for her as well as circumstances would allow. By the customs of marriage and by the laws of inheritance she was recognized and guarded.

Now it may appear that the problem of woman's place, so far from approaching solution in Christian times, has rather fallen into greater confusion; and many are the attacks made from one point of view and another upon the present condition of things. By the nature school of revolutionaries physical constitution is made a starting-point in argument and the reasoning sweeps before it every hindrance to the completion of life on that side for women as for men. Christian marriage is itself assailed by these as an obstacle in the path of evolution. They find women, thanks to Christianity, no longer unable to establish themselves in life; but against Christianity which has done this

they raise the loud complaint that it bars the individual from full life and enjoyment. In the course of our discussion of the Book of Judges reference has been made once and again to this propaganda, and here its real nature comes to light. Its conception of human life is based on mere animalism; it throws into the crucible the gain of the centuries in spiritual discipline and energetic purity in order to make ample provision for the flesh and the fulfilling of the lusts thereof.

But the problem is not more confused; it is solved, as all other problems are by Christ. Penetrating and arrogant voices of the day will cease and His again be heard Whose terrible and gracious doctrine of personal responsibility in the supernatural order is already the heart of human thought and hope. There is turmoil, disorder, vile and foolish experimenting; but the remedy is forward not behind. Christ has opened the spiritual kingdom, has made it possible for every soul to enter. For each human being now, man and woman, life means spiritual overcoming, spiritual possession, and can mean nothing else. It is altogether out of date, an insult to the conscience and common sense of mankind, not to speak of its faith, to go back on the primitive world and the ages of a lower evolution and fasten down to sensuousness a race that has heard the liberating word, Repent, believe and live. The incompleteness of a human being lies in subjection to passion, in existing without moral energy, governed by the earthly and therefore without hope or reason of life. To the full stature of heavenly power the woman has her way open through the blood of the cross, and by a path of loneliness and privation, if need be, she may advance to the highest range of priestly service and blessing.

To the Jewish people and to the writer of the Book of Ruth as a Jew genealogy was of more account than to us, and a place in David's ancestry appears as the final honour of Ruth for her dutifulness, her humble faith in the God of Israel. Orpah is forgotten; she remained with her own people and died in obscurity. But faithful Ruth lives distinguished in history. She takes her place among the matrons of Bethlehem and the people of God. The story of her life, says one, stands at the portal of the life of David and at the gates of the gospel.

Yet suppose Ruth had not been married to Boaz or to any other good and wealthy man, would she have been less admirable and deserving? We attribute nothing to accident. In the providence of God Boaz was led to an admiration for Ruth and Naomi's plan succeeded. But it might have been otherwise. There is nothing, after all, so striking in her faith that we should expect her to be singled out for special honour; and she is not. The divine reward of goodness is the peace of God in the soul, the gladness of fellowship with Him, the opportunity of learning His will and dispensing His grace. It is interesting to note that Ruth's son Obed was the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. But was Ruth no also the ancestress of the sons of Zeruiah, of Absalom, Adonijah and Rehoboam? Even though looking down the generations we see the Messiah born of her line, how can that glorify Ruth? or, if it does, how shall we explain the want of glory of many an estimable and godly woman who fighting a battle harder than Ruth's, with clearer faith in God, lived and died in some obscure village of Naphtali or dragged out a weary widowhood on the borders of the Syrian desert?

Yet there is a sense in which the history of Ruth stands at the gates of the gospel. It bears the lesson that Jehovah acknowledged all who did justly and loved mercy and walked humbly with Him. The foreign woman was justified by faith, and her faith had its reward when she was accepted as one of Jehovah's people and knew Him as her gracious Friend. Israel had in this book the warrant for missionary work among the pagan nations and a beautiful apologue of the reconciliation the faith of Jehovah was to effect among the severed families of mankind. The same faith is ours, but with deeper urgency, the same spirit of reconciliation reaching now to farther mightier issues. We have seen the Goël of the race and have heard His offer of redemption. We are commissioned to those who dwell in the remotest borders of the moral world under oppressions of heathenism and fear or wander in strange Moabs of confusion where deep calleth unto deep. We have to testify that with One and One only are the light, the joy, the completeness of man, because He alone among sages and helpers has the secret of our sin and weakness and the long miracle of the soul's redemption. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation: and lo, I am with you." The faith of the Hebrew is more than fulfilled. Out of Israel He comes our Menuchah, Who is "*an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.*"

INDEX.

ACHSAH, 20.
Adoni-bezek, 12.
Adventurer, the, 211.
Agnosticism, 156.
Altars, local, 338.
Amalek, 78.
Amorites, 64.
Angel of Jehovah, 147.
Ascendency of races, 14.
Astarte, 52.

BAAL, 52.
Baal-berith, the modern, 221.
Baal-peor, 51.
Balaam, 70.
Barak, the Lightning Chief, 99; agreement with Deborah, 122.
Barbarism, the new, 140.
Bethlehem, 364.

CANAAN, its population, 6; central position, 6; degeneracy of its people, 8; gods of, 52.
Character, national, 205; of Arabs, 239; decision of, 378.
Charity, careless, 399.
Christ, the Strengthener, 42, 43; and the inquirer, 124; and the church, 152, 177; critics of, 154; personal pledge to, 160, 383; enemies of, 181; priesthood of, 208; kingship of, 228; sacrifice of, 251, 332; manliness of, 264; the temple, 343; His teaching as to wealth, 388.
Christianity secularized, 330.
Church, the, opposition to, 79, 82; leaders in, 123; custody of truth by, 124; world in, 133; elation of, 139; right spirit of, 152; confusion in, 171; national, 176; attacks upon, 186; perpetual duty of, 353.
Completeness of life, 416.
Compromise, 88, 402; with heathens, 98.
Concentration, 175; and breadth, 275.
Conscience, correlative of power, 303; and life, 353, 354; insanity of, 357.
Conversion, 27, 159; imperfect, 41; helped by circumstances, 158; complete, 160; Ruth's, 381.
Co-partnery, with the world, 220; between Hebrew and Philistine, 284.
Creed, the old, 172.
Culture, 20, 88; affecting religion, 228.

Cushan-rishathaim, 69.
Custom, old, why recorded, 408.

Danite migration, 340.
Date of Book of Ruth, 409.
Deborah, 91; inspiration of, 96, 102, 108; her wisdom, 100; not unmerciful, 117; her judgeship, 135.
Dependents, duty to, 414.
Dependence, ignoble, 297.
Divine judgment, 11; of Meroz the prudent, 132.
Divine Vindicator, the, 394.
Doubt, religious, 26.

Earth-force in man, 149.
Ecclesiasticism, 167, 201.
Education, 273.
Ehud, 83.
Emigration, 366.
Entanglements, base, 301.
Equipment for life, 184.
Evil, despotic, 287.
Evolution, spiritual, 4, 85, 109.
Ezra, 38.

Faint yet pursuing, 191.
Faith, development of, 4; conflicts of, 27; link between generations, 49; army of, 128; recuperative power of, 141; power through, 203; ebb and flow of, 233; saves, not doing, 300; courage forced on, 347.
Fidelity depends on religion, 405.
Fittest, survival of, 9.
Fleece, Gideon's, 169.
Freedom, cradle of faith, 85, 86, 90; right of the rude, 258.
Free-lance, 304.

Gibeah, crime of, 348.
Gideon, 144; his fleece, 169; his three hundred, 173; kingship refused by, 196; his caution, 197; desire for priesthood, 198; his ephod-dealing, 202; a storm of God, 204.
Gilead, its vigour, 235.
God with man, 146.
Goël, duty of, 398.
Gospel, at the gates of, 420.

Heathenism, rites of, 53.
Hebrews, language of, 31; intermixture with Canaanites, 68; national spirit of, 234.
Heroism, 149.
History, key to, 5, 295.
Hittites, 65.
Honey from the carcase, 289.
Humanity, priesthood of, 208.

Ideal, of life, 29; for Israel, 48, 242.
Idolatry, 33; unpardonable, 49.
Intolerance, moral, 354.
Israel, mission of, 13; oppressed by Cushan-rishathaim, 72; by Jabin, 92; by Midianites, 137; tribes of, 97, 132, 167; its idea of Jehovah, 107, 118; superiority of, 55, 69, 90.

Jael, 103, 134; her tragic moment, 105.
Jealousy, tribal, 255.
Jebusites, 28.
Jephthah, the outlaw, 235; chosen leader, 236; his peaceful policy, 240; his vow, 243; his daughter, 247.
Jerusalem 15.

Joash of Abiezer, 156.
Joshua, 45.
Jotham's parable, 214.
Judges, their vindication, 57.
Justice, passion for, 58; human effort for, 104; should be open, 412.

KENITES, 24.
Kingship, refused by Gideon, 196.
Kiriath-sepher, 18.

LEADERS, uncalled, 163.
Leadership, incomplete, 161.
Levites, 338.
Life, the law of, 294, 299; hindrances to, 296; fear hindering, 297; complete, 314.
Literature, 19; Danites of, 345, 346.
Love, 380.
Luz, 28.

MARRIAGE, 20; a failure? 24; rash experiments in, 284.
Marriages, mixed, 38.
Master-strokes in providence, 158.
Meroz, 132.
Micah, 335.
Midianites, 137, 195.
Missionary spirit, 137.
Moab, 77, 367.
Moderatism, 166.
Monotheism, 32.
Moral intolerance, 354.
Moses, 13, 19.
Motherhood, 268.

NATIONAL church, 176.
Nature, God revealed in, 111-15; and supernatural, 266.
Nature-cult, 42, 418.
Nazirite vow, 276.
Nomadism, religious, 25.

OPPORTUNISM, 166.
Organized vice, 179.
Orpah, 376.
Othniel, 22, 73.

PARENTAGE, 271.
Past, the, returning, 71; lessons of, 410.
Pastors, unspiritual, 344.
Patriotism, religious, 226.
Personal ends engrossing, 136.
Personality, 15; in religion, 379.
Pessimism, 230.
Pharisaism, 39; danger of, 356.
Philistines, 26, 62.
Philistinism, 310, 329.
Phœnicians, 63.
Polygamy, 21, 351.
Polytheism, its development, 54.
Prayer, 142, 143, 231.
Predestination, 269.
Priesthood, Gideon's desire for, 198; true, 206; Roman Catholic, 246.
Prophets, unrecognized, 162; their preparation, 270.
Prosperity, misunderstood, 388.
Providence, imperfect instruments of, 58, 84.
Public office, 216.
Purity, 350.

RECONCILIATION, religion always for, 395.
Reformer, his character, 153.
Reformation, the true, 155.
Religion, emotional, 130; and the state, 36, 75.
Remnant, the godly, 126, 131.
Repentance, imperfect, 40.
Responsibility, 300; in advising, 370.
Retribution, 138.

Rich, obligations of, 390.
Rights and duties, 30, 256.
Ruth, her choice, 377; conversion of, 381; goodness commending her, 392; her danger, 401; her marriage, 416.

Sacred places, 33.
Salvation, personal, 151.
Samson, his loneliness, 279; boyhood of, 280; character of, 281; his marriage, 290; his riddle, 291; no reformer, 308.
Schism, 342, 345.
Science, dogmatism of, 112; Danites of, 345.
Self-respect, 312.
Self-sacrifice, 249, 331, 333.
Self-suppression, 16, 251, 375.
Self-vindication, 358.
Separations in life, 383.
Shechem, 210.
Shibboleths, of reform, 262; allowable, 263; Christ used none, 264.
Sibboleths, of egotism, 260; of bad habit, 260; of literature, 261.
Sisera, 101.
Spiritual brotherhood, 151; strength, 321, 324; service, 369; pauperism, 400.
Strength and character, 193.
Struggle, the law of existence, 10.
Success, sanctified, 80; succeeding, 189.
Succoth and Penuel, 190.
Supernatural in human life, 267.

Temptation, 287; process of, 317.
Theocracy, 3, 46; Jotham's idea of, 214, 218.
Tribal religion, 328.
Truth and charity, 228.

Unscrupulous helpers, 133.

Veracity of the narrative, 359.
Vicarious suffering, 355.
Voluntary churches, 176.

Wars of conquest, 5.
Women, treatment of, 21; their freedom, 22; duties of, 125, social bondage of, 372; helpless, 373; submission preached to 375; problems in their life, 416, 418.
Wrong never strong, 182.

Zephath, 25.

THE

BOOKS OF CHRONICLES

BY

W. H. BENNETT, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE, HACKNEY AND NEW COLLEGES; SOMETIME FELLOW OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

NEW YORK
FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY
LAFAYETTE PLACE
1900

PREFACE

TO expound Chronicles in a series which has dealt with Samuel, Kings, Ezra, and Nehemiah is to glean scattered ears from a field already harvested. Sections common to Chronicles with the older histories have therefore been treated as briefly as is consistent with preserving the continuity of the narrative. Moreover, an exposition of Chronicles does not demand or warrant an attempt to write the history of Judah. To recombine with Chronicles matter which its author deliberately omitted would only obscure the characteristic teaching he intended to convey. On the one hand, his selection of material has a religious significance, which must be ascertained by careful comparison with Samuel and Kings; on the other hand, we can only do justice to the chronicler as we ourselves adopt, for the time being, his own attitude towards the history of Hebrew politics, literature, and religion. In the more strictly expository

parts of this volume I have sought to confine myself to the carrying out of these principles.

Amongst other obligations to friends, I must specially mention my indebtedness to the Rev. T. H. Darlow, M.A., for a careful reading of the proof-sheets and many very valuable suggestions.

One object I have had in view has been to attempt to show the fresh force and clearness with which modern methods of Biblical study have emphasised the spiritual teaching of Chronicles.

CONTENTS

BOOK I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

PAGE

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP 3

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL SETTING 6

CHAPTER III

SOURCES AND MODE OF COMPOSITION 13

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRONICLES 22

BOOK II

GENEALOGIES

1 CHRON. i.–ix., etc.

CHAPTER I

NAMES 29

CHAPTER II

HEREDITY 46

CHAPTER III

STATISTICS 64

CHAPTER IV

PAGE

FAMILY TRADITIONS 72

CHAPTER V

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE TIME OF THE CHRONICLER 92

CHAPTER VI

TEACHING BY ANACHRONISM 111

BOOK III

MESSIANIC AND OTHER TYPES

1 CHRON. x.—2 CHRON. ix.; xxviii., etc.

CHAPTER I

TEACHING BY TYPES 125

CHAPTER II

DAVID: HIS TRIBE AND DYNASTY 133

CHAPTER III

DAVID: HIS PERSONAL HISTORY 142

CHAPTER IV

DAVID: HIS OFFICIAL DIGNITY 161

CHAPTER V

SOLOMON 169

CHAPTER VI

SOLOMON (*continued*) 181

CHAPTER VII

THE WICKED KINGS 198

CHAPTER VIII

PAGE

THE PRIESTS 221

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHETS 240

CHAPTER X

SATAN 270

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION 299

BOOK IV

THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

2 CHRON. x.—end, etc.

CHAPTER I

THE LAST PRAYER OF DAVID 313

1 CHRON. xxix. 10-19.

CHAPTER II

REHOBOAM AND ABIJAH: THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL 320

2 CHRON. x.-xiii.

CHAPTER III

ASA: DIVINE RETRIBUTION 338

2 CHRON. xiv.-xvi.

CHAPTER IV

JEHOSHAPHAT: THE DOCTRINE OF NON-RESISTANCE . 366

2 CHRON. xvii.-xx.

CHAPTER V

PAGE

JEHORAM, AHAZIAH, AND ATHALIAH: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FOREIGN MARRIAGE 393

2 CHRON. xxi.-xxiii.

CHAPTER VI

JOASH AND AMAZIAH 403

2 CHRON. xxiv.-xxv.

CHAPTER VII

UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AND AHAZ 418

2 CHRON. xxvi.-xxviii.

CHAPTER VIII

HEZEKIAH: THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF MUSIC . . 427

2 CHRON. xxix.-xxxii.

CHAPTER IX

MANASSEH: REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS . . 444

2 CHRON. xxxiii.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH 455

2 CHRON. xxxiv.-xxxvi.

INDEX

(The larger figures in black type are the chief references)

1 Chronicles

CHAP.	PAGE
i.-ix.	**29-121**
i.	**48**, 72
ii.	**50**, 74, 106
iii.	**51**, 106
iv.	**57**, 75, 78, 79, 106
v.	**84**, 86
vi.	**52**, 96
vii.	**87**
viii.	**53**, 175
ix.	**53**, 96, 98, 102, 105
x.	**151**
xi.	**151**, 158
xii.	**152**, 250
xiii.	**153**, 164
xiv.	147
xv.	96
xvi.	97, 157
xvii.	**154**, 101, 157
xviii.	**154**
xix.	154
xx.	**154**, 148, 159
xxi.-xxix.	**155**
xxi.	**270**, 154
xxii.	175
xxiii.	**99**, 100
xxiv.	100, 103
xxv.	103
xxvi.	101, 104
xxvii.	155
xxviii.	155
xxix.	**313**, **156**, 175

2 Chronicles

CHAP.	PAGE
i.	175, 176
ii.	174
iii.-v.	176
vi.	176
vii.	177
viii.	173, 174, 178, 179
ix.	172, 179
x.	**320**

CHAP.	PAGE	CHAP.	PAGE
xi.	322	xxiv.	403, 182, 244
xii.	324, 243	xxv.	413, 183, 245
xiii.	326	xxvi.	418
xiv.	338, 182	xxvii.	424
xv.	348, 182, 243	xxviii.	198, 183, 426
xvi.	353, 243	xxix.	427, 98, 243
xvii.	366, 182	xxx.	432
xviii.	368	xxxi.	438, 103
xix.	369, 102, 244	xxxii.	438, 246
xx.	372, 244	xxxiii.	444, 183, 247
xxi.	393, 182, 244	xxxiv.	455, 100, 183
xxii.	399	xxxv.	458, 100, 183, 247
xxiii.	400	xxxvi.	460

BOOK I

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

CHRONICLES is a curious literary torso. A comparison with Ezra and Nehemiah shows that the three originally formed a single whole. They are written in the same peculiar late Hebrew style; they use their sources in the same mechanical way; they are all saturated with the ecclesiastical spirit; and their Church order and doctrine rest upon the complete Pentateuch, and especially upon the Priestly Code. They take the same keen interest in genealogies, statistics, building operations, Temple ritual, priests and Levites, and most of all in the Levitical doorkeepers and singers. Ezra and Nehemiah form an obvious continuation of Chronicles; the latter work breaks off in the middle of a paragraph intended to introduce the account of the return from the Captivity; Ezra repeats the beginning of the paragraph and gives its conclusion. Similarly the register of the high-priests is begun in 1 Chron. vi. 4-15 and completed in Neh. xii. 10, 11.

We may compare the whole work to the image in Daniel's vision whose head was of fine gold, his breast and arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Ezra and Nehemiah preserve some of the finest historical material in the Old Testament, and are our only

authority for a most important crisis in the religion of Israel. The torso that remains when these two books are removed is of very mixed character, partly borrowed from the older historical books, partly taken down from late tradition, and partly constructed according to the current philosophy of history.

The date[1] of this work lies somewhere between the conquest of the Persian empire by Alexander and the revolt of the Maccabees, *i.e.*, between B.C. 332 and B.C. 166. The register in Neh. xii. 10, 11, closes with Jaddua, the well-known high-priest of Alexander's time; the genealogy of the house of David in 1 Chron. iii. extends to about the same date, or, according to the ancient versions, even down to about B.C. 200. The ecclesiastical system of the priestly code, established by Ezra and Nehemiah B.C. 444, was of such old standing to the author of Chronicles that he introduces it as a matter of course into his descriptions of the worship of the monarchy. Another feature which even more clearly indicates a late date is the use of the term "king of Persia" instead of simply "the King" or "the Great King." The latter were the customary designations of the Persian kings while the empire lasted; after its fall, the title needed to be qualified by the name "Persia." These facts, together with the style and language, would be best accounted for by a date somewhere between B.C. 300 and B.C. 250. On the other hand, the Maccabæan struggle revolutionised the national and ecclesiastical system which Chronicles everywhere takes for granted, and the silence of the author as to this revolution is conclusive proof that he wrote before it began.

[1] Cf. *Ezra*; *Nehemiah*; *Esther*, by Professor Adeney, in "Expositor's Bible."

There is no evidence whatever as to the name of the author; but his intense interest in the Levites and in the musical service of the Temple, with its orchestra and choir, renders it extremely probable that he was a Levite and a Temple-singer or musician. We might compare the Temple, with its extensive buildings and numerous priesthood, to an English cathedral establishment, and the author of Chronicles to some vicar-choral, or, perhaps better, to the more dignified precentor. He would be enthusiastic over his music, a cleric of studious habits and scholarly tastes, not a man of the world, but absorbed in the affairs of the Temple, as a monk in the life of his convent or a minor canon in the politics and society of the minster close. The times were uncritical, and so our author was occasionally somewhat easy of belief as to the enormous magnitude of ancient Hebrew armies and the splendour and wealth of ancient Hebrew kings; the narrow range of his interests and experience gave him an appetite for innocent gossip, professional or otherwise. But his sterling religious character is shown by the earnest piety and serene faith which pervade his work. If we venture to turn to English fiction for a rough illustration of the position and history of our chronicler, the name that at once suggests itself is that of Mr. Harding, the precentor in *Barchester Towers*. We must however remember that there is very little to distinguish the chronicler from his later authorities; and the term "chronicler" is often used for "the chronicler or one of his predecessors."

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL SETTING

IN the previous chapter it has been necessary to deal with the chronicler as the author of the whole work of which Chronicles is only a part, and to go over again ground already covered in the volume on Ezra and Nehemiah; but from this point we can confine our attention to Chronicles and treat it as a separate book. Such a course is not merely justified, it is necessitated, by the different relations of the chronicler to his subject in Ezra and Nehemiah on the one hand and in Chronicles on the other. In the former case he is writing the history of the social and ecclesiastical order to which he himself belonged, but he is separated by a deep and wide gulf from the period of the kingdom of Judah. About three hundred years intervened between the chronicler and the death of the last king of Judah. A similar interval separates us from Queen Elizabeth; but the course of these three centuries of English life has been an almost unbroken continuity compared with the changing fortunes of the Jewish people from the fall of the monarchy to the early years of the Greek empire. This interval included the Babylonian captivity and the return, the establishment of the Law, the rise of the Persian empire, and the conquests of Alexander.

The first three of these events were revolutions of supreme importance to the internal development of Judaism; the last two rank in the history of the world with the fall of the Roman empire and the French Revolution. Let us consider them briefly in detail. The Captivity, the rise of the Persian empire, and the Return are closely connected, and can only be treated as features of one great social, political, and religious convulsion, an upheaval which broke the continuity of all the strata of Eastern life and opened an impassable gulf between the old order and the new. For a time, men who had lived through these revolutions were still able to carry across this gulf the loosely twisted strands of memory, but when they died the threads snapped; only here and there a lingering tradition supplemented the written records. Hebrew slowly ceased to be the vernacular language, and was supplanted by Aramaic; the ancient history only reached the people by means of an oral translation. Under this new dispensation the ideas of ancient Israel were no longer intelligible; its circumstances could not be realised by those who lived under entirely different conditions. Various causes contributed to bring about this change. First, there was an interval of fifty years, during which Jerusalem lay a heap of ruins. After the recapture of Rome by Totila the Visigoth in A.D. 546 the city was abandoned during forty days to desolate and dreary solitude. Even this temporary depopulation of the Eternal City is emphasised by historians as full of dramatic interest, but the fifty years' desolation of Jerusalem involved important practical results. Most of the returning exiles must have either been born in Babylon or else have spent all their earliest years in exile. Very few can have been old enough to have

grasped the meaning or drunk in the spirit of the older national life. When the restored community set to work to rebuild their city and their temple, few of them had any adequate knowledge of the old Jerusalem, with its manners, customs, and traditions. "The ancient men, that had seen the first house, wept with a loud voice"[1] when the foundation of the second Temple was laid before their eyes. In their critical and disparaging attitude towards the new building, we may see an early trace of the tendency to glorify and idealise the monarchical period, which culminated in Chronicles. The breach with the past was widened by the novel and striking surroundings of the exiles in Babylon. For the first time since the Exodus, the Jews as a nation found themselves in close contact and intimate relations with the culture of an ancient civilisation and the life of a great city.

Nearly a century and a half elapsed between the first captivity under Jehoiachin (B.C. 598) and the mission of Ezra (B.C. 458); no doubt in the succeeding period Jews still continued to return from Babylon to Judæa, and thus the new community at Jerusalem, amongst whom the chronicler grew up, counted Babylonian Jews amongst their ancestors for two or even for many generations. A Zulu tribe exhibited for a year in London could not return and build their kraal afresh and take up the old African life at the point where they had left it. If a community of Russian Jews went to their old home after a few years' sojourn in Whitechapel, the old life resumed would be very different from what it was before their migration. Now the Babylonian Jews were neither uncivilised African savages nor stupefied Russian helots; they

[1] Ezra iii. 12.

were not shut up in an exhibition or in a ghetto; they settled in Babylon, not for a year or two, but for half a century or even a century; and they did not return to a population of their own race, living the old life, but to empty homes and a ruined city. They had tasted the tree of new knowledge, and they could no more live and think as their fathers had done than Adam and Eve could find their way back into paradise. A large and prosperous colony of Jews still remained at Babylon, and maintained close and constant relations with the settlement in Judæa. The influence of Babylon, begun during the Exile, continued permanently in this indirect form. Later still the Jews felt the influence of a great Greek city, through their colony at Alexandria.

Besides these external changes, the Captivity was a period of important and many-sided development of Jewish literature and religion. Men had leisure to study the prophecies of Jeremiah and the legislation of Deuteronomy; their attention was claimed for Ezekiel's suggestions as to ritual, and for the new theology, variously expounded by Ezekiel, the later Isaiah, the book of Job, and the psalmists. The Deuteronomic school systematised and interpreted the records of the national history. In its wealth of Divine revelation the period from Josiah to Ezra is only second to the apostolic age.

Thus the restored Jewish community was a new creation, baptised into a new spirit; the restored city was as much a new Jerusalem as that which St. John beheld descending out of heaven; and, in the words of the prophet of the Restoration, the Jews returned to a "new heaven and a new earth."[1] The rise of the

[1] Isa. lxvi. 22.

Persian empire changed the whole international system of Western Asia and Egypt. The robber monarchies of Nineveh and Babylon, whose energies had been chiefly devoted to the systematic plunder of their neighbours, were replaced by a great empire, that stretched out one hand to Greece and the other to India. The organisation of this great empire was the most successful attempt at government on a large scale that the world had yet seen. Both through the Persians themselves and through their dealings with the Greeks, Aryan philosophy and religion began to leaven Asiatic thought; old things were passing away: all things were becoming new.

The establishment of the Law by Ezra and Nehemiah was the triumph of a school whose most important and effective work had been done at Babylon, though not necessarily within the half-century specially called the Captivity. Their triumph was retrospective: it not only established a rigid and elaborate system unknown to the monarchy, but, by identifying this system with the law traditionally ascribed to Moses, it led men very widely astray as to the ancient history of Israel. A later generation naturally assumed that the good kings must have kept this law, and that the sin of the bad kings was their failure to observe its ordinances.

The events of the century and a half or thereabouts between Ezra and the chronicler have only a minor importance for us. The change of language from Hebrew to Aramaic, the Samaritan schism, the few political incidents of which any account has survived, are all trivial compared to the literature and history crowded into the century after the fall of the monarchy. Even the far-reaching results of the conquests of Alexander do not materially concern us here. Josephus

indeed tells us that the Jews served in large numbers in the Macedonian army, and gives a very dramatic account of Alexander's visit to Jerusalem; but the historical value of these stories is very doubtful, and in any case it is clear that between B.C. 333 and B.C. 250 Jerusalem was very little affected by Greek influences, and that, especially for the Temple community to which the chronicler belonged, the change from Darius to the Ptolemies was merely a change from one foreign dominion to another.

Nor need much be said of the relation of the chronicler to the later Jewish literature of the Apocalypses and Wisdom. If the spirit of this literature were already stirring in some Jewish circles, the chronicler himself was not moved by it. Ecclesiastes, as far as he could have understood it, would have pained and shocked him. But his work lay in that direct line of subtle rabbinic teaching which, beginning with Ezra, reached its climax in the Talmud. Chronicles is really an anthology gleaned from ancient historic sources and supplemented by early specimens of Midrash and Hagada.

In order to understand the book of Chronicles, we have to keep two or three simple facts constantly and clearly in mind. In the first place, the chronicler was separated from the monarchy by an aggregate of changes which involved a complete breach of continuity between the old and the new order: instead of a nation there was a Church; instead of a king there were a high-priest and a foreign governor. Secondly, the effects of these changes had been at work for two or three hundred years, effacing all trustworthy recollection of the ancient order and schooling men to regard the Levitical dispensation as their one original and antique

ecclesiastical system. Lastly, the chronicler himself belonged to the Temple community, which was the very incarnation of the spirit of the new order. With such antecedents and surroundings, he set to work to revise the national history recorded in Samuel and Kings. A monk in a Norman monastery would have worked under similar but less serious disadvantages if he had undertaken to rewrite the *Ecclesiastical History* of the Venerable Bede.

CHAPTER III

SOURCES AND MODE OF COMPOSITION

OUR impressions as to the sources of Chronicles are derived from the general character of its contents, from a comparison with other books of the Old Testament, and from the actual statements of Chronicles itself. To take the last first: there are numerous references to authorities in Chronicles which at first sight seem to indicate a dependence on rich and varied sources. To begin with, there are "The Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel,"[1] "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah,"[2] and "The Acts of the Kings of Israel."[3] These, however, are obviously different forms of the title of the same work.

Other titles furnish us with an imposing array of prophetic authorities. There are "The *Words*" of Samuel the Seer,[4] of Nathan the Prophet,[5] of Gad the Seer,[4] of Shemaiah the Prophet and of Iddo the Seer,[6]

[1] Quoted for *Asa* (2 Chron. xvi. 11); *Amaziah* (2 Chron. xxv. 26); *Ahaz* (2 Chron. xxviii. 26).

[2] Quoted for *Jotham* (2 Chron. xxvii. 7); *Josiah* (2 Chron. xxxv. 26, 27).

[3] Quoted for *Manasseh* (2 Chron. xxxiii. 18).

[4] Quoted for *David* (1 Chron. xxix. 29).

[5] Quoted for *David* (1 Chron. xxix. 29) and *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

[6] Quoted for *Rehoboam* (2 Chron. xii. 15).

of Jehu the son of Hanani,[1] and of the Seers[2]; "The *Vision*" of Iddo the Seer[3] and of Isaiah the Prophet[4]; "The *Midrash*" of the Book of Kings[5] and of the Prophet Iddo[6]; "The *Acts* of Uzziah," written by Isaiah the Prophet[7]; and "The *Prophecy*" of Ahijah the Shilonite.[8] There are also less formal allusions to other works.

Further examination, however, soon discloses the fact that these prophetic titles merely indicate different sections of "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah." On turning to our book of Kings, we find that from Rehoboam onwards each of the references in Chronicles corresponds to a reference by the book of Kings to the "Chronicles[9] of the Kings of Judah." In the case of Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Amon, the reference to an authority is omitted both in the books of Kings and Chronicles. This close correspondence suggests that both our canonical books are referring to the same authority or authorities. Kings refers to the "Chronicles of the Kings of Judah" for Judah, and to the "Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" for the northern kingdom; Chronicles, though only dealing with Judah, combines these two titles in one: "The Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah."

---

[1] Quoted for *Jehoshaphat* (2 Chron. xx. 34).

[2] Quoted for *Manasseh* (2 Chron. xxxiii. 19). "Seers," A.V., R.V. Marg., with LXX.; R.V., with Hebrew text, "Hozai." The passage is probably corrupt.

[3] Quoted for *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

[4] Quoted for *Hezekiah* (2 Chron. xxxii. 32).

[5] Quoted for *Joash* (2 Chron. xxiv. 27).

[6] Quoted for *Abijah* (2 Chron. xiii. 22).

[7] Quoted for *Uzziah* (2 Chron. xxvi. 22).

[8] Quoted for *Solomon* (2 Chron. ix. 29).

[9] Cf. pp. 17, 18.

In two instances Chronicles clearly states that its prophetic authorities were found as sections of the larger work. "The Words of Jehu the son of Hanani" were "inserted in the Book of the Kings of Israel,"[1] and "The Vision of Isaiah the Prophet, the son of Amoz," is in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.[2] It is a natural inference that the other "Words" and "Visions" were also found as sections of this same "Book of Kings."

These conclusions may be illustrated and supported by what we know of the arrangement of the contents of ancient books. Our convenient modern subdivisions of chapter and verse did not exist, but the Jews were not without some means of indicating the particular section of a book to which they wished to refer. Instead of numbers they used names, derived from the subject of a section or from the most important person mentioned in it. For the history of the monarchy the prophets were the most important personages, and each section of the history is named after its leading prophet or prophets. This nomenclature naturally encouraged the belief that the history had been originally written by these prophets. Instances of the use of such nomenclature are found in the New Testament, *e.g.*, Rom. xi. 2: "Wot ye not what the Scripture saith in Elijah"[3] —*i.e.*, in the section about Elijah—and Mark xii. 26: "Have ye not read in the book of Moses in the place concerning the bush?"[4]

While, however, most of the references to "Words," "Visions," etc., are to sections of the larger work, we need not at once conclude that *all* references to authorities in Chronicles are to this same book. The

[1] 2 Chron. xx. 34.
[2] 2 Chron. xxxii. 32.
[3] R.V. marg.
[4] R.V.

genealogical register in 1 Chron. v. 17 and the "lamentations" of 2 Chron. xxxv. 25 may very well be independent works. Having recognised the fact that the numerous authorities referred to by Chronicles were for the most part contained in one comprehensive "Book of Kings," a new problem presents itself: What are the respective relations of our Kings and Chronicles to the "Chronicles" and "Kings" cited by them? What are the relations of these original authorities to each other? What are the relations of our Kings to our Chronicles? Our present nomenclature is about as confusing as it well could be; and we are obliged to keep clearly in mind, first, that the "Chronicles" mentioned in Kings is not our Chronicles, and then that the "Kings" referred to by Chronicles is not our Kings. The first fact is obvious; the second is shown by the terms of the references, which state that information not furnished in Chronicles may be found in the "Book of Kings," but the information in question is often not given in the canonical Kings.[1] And yet the connection between Kings and Chronicles is very close and extensive. A large amount of material occurs either identically or with very slight variations in both books. It is clear that either Chronicles uses Kings, or Chronicles uses a work which used Kings, or both Chronicles and Kings use the same source or sources. Each of these three views has been held by important authorities, and they are also capable of various combinations and modifications.

Reserving for a moment the view which specially commends itself to us, we may note two main tendencies of opinion. First, it is maintained that Chronicles

[1] *E.g.*, the wars of Jotham (2 Chron. xxvii. 7).

either goes back directly to the actual sources of Kings, citing them, for the sake of brevity, under a combined title, or is based upon a combination of the main sources of Kings made at a very early date. In either case Chronicles as compared with Kings would be an independent and parallel authority on the contents of these early sources, and to that extent would rank with Kings as first-class history. This view, however, is shown to be untenable by the numerous traces of a later age which are almost invariably present wherever Chronicles supplements or modifies Kings.

The second view is that either Chronicles used Kings, or that the "Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah" used by Chronicles was a post-Exilic work, incorporating statistical matter and dealing with the history of the two kingdoms in a spirit congenial to the temper and interests of the restored community. This "post-Exilic" predecessor of Chronicles is supposed to have been based upon Kings itself, or upon the sources of Kings, or upon both; but in any case it was not much earlier than Chronicles and was written under the same influences and in a similar spirit. Being virtually an earlier edition of Chronicles, it could claim no higher authority, and would scarcely deserve either recognition or treatment as a separate work. Chronicles would still rest substantially on the authority of Kings.

It is possible to accept a somewhat simpler view, and to dispense with this shadowy and ineffectual first edition of Chronicles. In the first place, the chronicler does not appeal to the "Words" and "Visions" and the rest of his "Book of Kings" as authorities for his own statements; he merely refers his reader to them for further information which he himself does not furnish. This "Book of Kings" so often mentioned

is therefore neither a source nor an authority of Chronicles. There is nothing to prove that the chronicler himself was actually acquainted with the book. Again, the close correspondence already noted between these references in Chronicles and the parallel notes in Kings suggests that the former are simply expanded and modified from the latter, and the chronicler had never seen the book he referred to. The Books of Kings had stated where additional information could be found, and Chronicles simply repeated the reference without verifying it. As some sections of Kings had come to be known by the names of certain prophets, the chronicler transferred these names back to the corresponding sections of the sources used by Kings. In these cases he felt he could give his readers not merely the somewhat vague reference to the original work as a whole, but the more definite and convenient citation of a particular paragraph. His descriptions of the additional subjects dealt with in the original authority may possibly, like other of his statements, have been constructed in accordance with his ideas of what that authority should contain ; or more probably they refer to this authority the floating traditions of later times and writers. Possibly these references and notes of Chronicles are copied from the glosses which some scribe had written in the margin of his copy of Kings. If this be so, we can understand why we find references to the Midrash of Iddo and the Midrash of the book of Kings.[1]

In any case, whether directly or through the medium of a preliminary edition, called "The Book of the Kings

[1] 2 Chron. xiii. 22; xxiv. 27. The LXX., however, does not read "Midrash" in either case; and it is quite possible that glosses have attached themselves to the text of Chronicles.

of Israel and Judah," our book of Kings was used by the chronicler. The supposition that the original sources of Kings were used by the chronicler or this immediate predecessor is fairly supported both by evidence and authority, but on the whole it seems an unnecessary complication.

Thus we fail to find in these various references to the "Book of Kings," etc., any clear indication of the origin of matter peculiar to Chronicles; nevertheless it is not difficult to determine the nature of the sources from which this material was derived. Doubtless some of it was still current in the form of oral tradition when the chronicler wrote, and owed to him its permanent record. Some he borrowed from manuscripts, which formed part of the scanty and fragmentary literature of the later period of the Restoration. His genealogies and statistics suggest the use of public and ecclesiastical archives, as well as of family records, in which ancient legend and anecdote lay embedded among lists of forgotten ancestors. Apparently the chronicler harvested pretty freely from that literary aftermath that sprang up when the Pentateuch and the earlier historical books had taken final shape.

But it is to these earlier books that the chronicler owes most. His work is very largely a mosaic of paragraphs and phrases taken from the older books. His chief sources are Samuel and Kings; he also lays the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Ruth under contribution. Much is taken over without even verbal alteration, and the greater part is unaltered in substance; yet, as is the custom in ancient literature, no acknowledgment is made. The literary conscience was not yet aware of the sin of plagiarism. Indeed, neither an author nor his friends took any pains to secure the permanent

association of his name with his work, and no great guilt can attach to the plagiarism of one anonymous writer from another. This absence of acknowledgment where the chronicler is plainly borrowing from elder scribes is another reason why his references to the "Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah" are clearly not statements of sources to which he is indebted, but simply what they profess to be: indications of the possible sources of further information.

Chronicles, however, illustrates ancient methods of historical composition, not only by its free appropriation of the actual form and substance of older works, but also by its curious blending of identical reproduction with large additions of quite heterogeneous matter, or with a series of minute but significant alterations. The primitive ideas and classical style of paragraphs from Samuel and Kings are broken in upon by the ritualistic fervour and late Hebrew of the chronicler's additions. The vivid and picturesque narrative of the bringing of the Ark to Zion is interpolated with uninteresting statistics of the names, numbers, and musical instruments of the Levites.[1] Much of the chronicler's account of the revolution which overthrew Athaliah and placed Joash on the throne is taken word for word from the book of Kings; but it is adapted to the Temple order of the Pentateuch by a series of alterations which substitute Levites for foreign mercenaries, and otherwise guard the sanctity of the Temple from the intrusion, not only of foreigners, but even of the common people.[2] A careful comparison of Chronicles with Samuel and Kings is a striking object lesson in ancient historical composition. It is

[1] Cf. 2 Sam. vi. 12–20 with 1 Chron. xv., xvi.

[2] Cf. 2 Kings xi.; 2 Chron. xxiii.

an almost indispensable introduction to the criticism of the Pentateuch and the older historical books. The "redactor" of these works becomes no mere shadowy and hypothetical personage when we have watched his successor the chronicler piecing together things new and old and adapting ancient narratives to modern ideas by adding a word in one place and changing a phrase in another.

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRONICLES

BEFORE attempting to expound in detail the religious significance of Chronicles, we may conclude our introduction by a brief general statement of the leading features which render the book interesting and valuable to the Christian student.

The material of Chronicles may be divided into three parts: the matter taken directly from the older historical books; material derived from traditions and writings of the chronicler's own age; the various additions and modifications which are the chronicler's own work.[1] Each of these divisions has its special value, and important lessons may be learnt from the way in which the author has selected and combined these materials.

The excerpts from the older histories are, of course, by far the best material in the book for the period of the monarchy. If Samuel and Kings had perished, we should have been under great obligations to the chronicler for preserving to us large portions of their

[1] The last two classes are not easily distinguished; but the additions which introduce the Levitical system into earlier history are clearly the work of the chronicler or his immediate predecessor, if such a predecessor be assumed, or were found in somewhat late sources. This is also probably true of other explanatory matter.

ancient records. As it is, the chronicler has rendered invaluable service to the textual criticism of the Old Testament by providing us with an additional witness to the text of large portions of Samuel and Kings. The very fact that the character and history of Chronicles are so different from those of the older books enhances the value of its evidence as to their text. The two texts, Samuel and Kings on the one hand and Chronicles on the other, have been modified under different influences; they have not always been altered in the same way, so that where one has been corrupted the other has often preserved the correct reading. Probably because Chronicles is less interesting and picturesque, its text has been subject to less alteration than that of Samuel and Kings. The more interested scribes or readers become, the more likely they are to make corrections and add glosses to the narrative. We may note, for example, that the name "Meribbaal" given by Chronicles for one of Saul's sons is more likely to be correct than "Mephibosheth," the form given by Samuel.[1]

The material derived from traditions and writings of the chronicler's own age is of uncertain historical value, and cannot be clearly discriminated from the author's free composition. Much of it was the natural product of the thought and feeling of the late Persian and early Greek period, and shares the importance which attaches to the chronicler's own work. This material, however, includes a certain amount of neutral matter: genealogies, family histories and anecdotes, and notes on ancient life and custom. We have no

[1] Cf. 2 Sam. iv. with 1 Chron. viii. 34, also 2 Sam. vii. 7 with 1 Chron. xvii. 6, and 2 Sam. xvii. 25 with 1 Chron. ii. 17. In both these instances Chronicles preserves the correct text.

parallel authorities to test this material, we cannot prove the antiquity of the sources from which it is derived, and yet it may contain fragments of very ancient tradition. Some of the notes and narratives have an archaic flavour which can scarcely be artificial; their very lack of importance is an argument for their authenticity, and illustrates the strange tenacity with which local and domestic tradition perpetuates the most insignificant episodes.[1]

But naturally the most characteristic, and therefore the most important, section of the contents of Chronicles is that made up of the additions and modifications which are the work of the chronicler or his immediate predecessors. It is unnecessary to point out that these do not add much to our knowledge of the history of the monarchy; their significance consists in the light that they throw upon the period towards whose close the chronicler lived: the period between the final establishment of Pentateuchal Judaism and the attempt of Antiochus Epiphanes to stamp it out of existence; the period between Ezra and Judas Maccabæus. The chronicler is no exceptional and epoch-making writer, has little personal importance, and is therefore all the more important as a typical representative of the current ideas of his class and generation. He translates the history of the past into the ideas and circumstances of his own age, and thus gives us almost as much information about the civil and religious institutions he lived under as if he had actually described them. Moreover, in stating its estimate of past history, each generation pronounces unconscious judgment upon itself. The chronicler's interpretation and philosophy

[1] Cf. Book II., Chap. IV.

of history mark the level of his moral and spiritual ideas. He betrays these quite as much by his attitude towards earlier authorities as in the paragraphs which are his own composition; we have seen how his use of materials illustrates the ancient, and for that matter the modern, Eastern methods of historical composition, and we have shown the immense importance of Chronicles to Old Testament criticism. But the way in which the chronicler uses his older sources also indicates his relation towards the ancient morality, ritual, and theology of Israel. His methods of selection are most instructive as to the ideas and interests of his time. We see what was thought worthy to be included in this final and most modern edition of the religious history of Israel. But in truth the omissions are among the most significant features of Chronicles; its silence is constantly more eloquent than its speech, and we measure the spiritual progress of Judaism by the paragraphs of Kings which Chronicles leaves out. In subsequent chapters we shall seek to illustrate the various ways in which Chronicles illuminates the period preceding the Maccabees. Any gleams of light on the Hebrew monarchy are most welcome, but we cannot be less grateful for information about those obscure centuries which fostered the quiet growth of Israel's character and faith and prepared the way for the splendid heroism and religious devotion of the Maccabæan struggle.

BOOK II

GENEALOGIES

CHAPTER I

NAMES

1 Chron. i.–ix.

THE first nine chapters of Chronicles form, with a few slight exceptions, a continuous list of names. It is the largest extant collection of Hebrew names. Hence these chapters may be used as a text for the exposition of any spiritual significance to be derived from Hebrew names either individually or collectively. Old Testament genealogies have often exercised the ingenuity of the preacher, and the student of homiletics will readily recollect the methods of extracting a moral from what at first sight seems a barren theme. For instance, those names of which little or nothing is recorded are held up as awful examples of wasted lives. We are asked to take warning from Mahalalel and Methuselah, who spent their long centuries so ineffectually that there was nothing to record except that they begat sons and daughters and died. Such teaching is not fairly derived from its text. The sacred writers implied no reflection upon the Patriarchs of whom they gave so short and conventional an account. Least of all could such teaching be based upon the lists in Chronicles, because the men who are there merely mentioned by name include Adam, Noah, Abraham, and other heroes

of sacred story. Moreover, such teaching is unnecessary and not altogether wholesome. Very few men who are at all capable of obtaining a permanent place in history need to be spurred on by sermons; and for most people the suggestion that a man's life is a failure unless he secures posthumous fame is false and mischievous. The Lamb's book of life is the only record of the vast majority of honourable and useful lives; and the tendency to self-advertisement is sufficiently wide-spread and spontaneous already: it needs no pulpit stimulus. We do not think any worse of a man because his tombstone simply states his name and age, or any better because it catalogues his virtues and mentions that he attained the dignity of alderman or author.

The significance of these lists of names is rather to be looked for in an opposite direction. It is not that a name and one or two commonplace incidents mean so little, but that they suggest so much. A mere parish register is not in itself attractive, but if we consider even such a list, the very names interest us and kindle our imagination. It is almost impossible to linger in a country churchyard, reading the half-effaced inscriptions upon the headstones, without forming some dim picture of the character and history and even the outward semblance of the men and women who once bore the names.

> "For though a name is neither
> . . . hand, nor foot,
> Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
> Belonging to a man,"

yet, to use a somewhat technical phrase, it *connotes* a man. A name implies the existence of a distinct personality, with a peculiar and unique history, and

yet, on the other hand, a being with whom we are linked in close sympathy by a thousand ties of common human nature and everyday experience. In its lists of what are now mere names, the Bible seems to recognise the dignity and sacredness of bare human life.

But the names in these nine chapters have also a collective significance: they stand for more than their individual owners. They are typical and representative, the names of kings, and priests, and captains; they sum up the tribes of Israel, both as a Church and a nation, down all the generations of its history. The inclusion of these names in the sacred record, as the express introduction to the annals of the Temple, and the sacred city, and the elect house of David, is the formal recognition of the sanctity of the nation and of national life. We are entirely in the spirit of the Bible when we see this same sanctity in all organised societies: in the parish, the municipality, and the state; when we attach a Divine significance to registers of electors and census returns, and claim all such lists as symbols of religious privilege and responsibility.

But names do not merely suggest individuals and communities: the meanings of the names reveal the ideas of the people who used them. It has been well said that "the names of every nation are an important monument of national spirit and manners, and thus the Hebrew names bear important testimony to the peculiar vocation of this nation. No nation of antiquity has such a proportion of names of religious import."[1] Amongst ourselves indeed the religious meaning of names has almost wholly faded away;

[1] Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, i. 283 (Eng. trans.).

"Christian name" is a mere phrase, and children are named after relations, or according to prevailing fashion, or after the characters of popular novels. But the religious motive can still be traced in some modern names; in certain districts of Germany the name "Ursula" or "Apollonia" is a sure indication that a girl is a Roman Catholic and has been named after a popular saint.[1] The Bible constantly insists upon this religious significance, which would frequently be in the mind of the devout Israelite in giving names to his children. The Old Testament contains more than a hundred etymologies [2] of personal names, most of which attach a religious meaning to the words explained. The etymologies of the patriarchal names—"Abraham," father of a multitude of nations; "Isaac," laughter; "Jacob," supplanter; "Israel," prince with God—are specially familiar. The Biblical interest in edifying etymologies was maintained and developed by early commentators. Their philology was far from accurate, and very often they were merely playing upon the forms of words. But the allegorising tendencies of Jewish and Christian expositors found special opportunities in proper names. On the narrow foundation of an etymology mostly doubtful and often impossible, Philo, and Origen, and Jerome loved to erect an elaborate structure of theological or philosophical doctrine. Philo has only one quotation from our author: "Manasseh had sons, whom his Syrian concubine bare to him, Machir; and Machir begat Gilead."[3] He quotes this verse to show that recollection is associated in a subordinate capacity

[1] Nestle, *Die Israelitischen Eigennamen*, p. 27. The present chapter is largely indebted to this standard monograph.

[2] Nestle.

[3] 1 Chron. vii. 14.

with memory. The connection is not very clearly made out, but rests in some way on the meaning of Manasseh, the root of which means to forget. As forgetfulness with recollection restores our knowledge, so Manasseh with his Syrian concubine begets Machir. Recollection therefore is a concubine, an inferior and secondary quality.[1] This ingenious trifling has a certain charm in spite of its extravagance, but in less dexterous hands the method becomes clumsy as well as extravagant. It has, however, the advantage of readily adapting itself to all tastes and opinions, so that we are not surprised when an eighteenth-century author discovers in Old Testament etymology a compendium of Trinitarian theology.[2] *Ahiah*[3] is derived from *'ehad*, one, and *yah*, Jehovah, and is thus an assertion of the Divine unity; *Reuel*[4] is resolved into a plural verb with a singular Divine name for its subject: this is an indication of trinity in unity; *Ahilud*[5] is derived from *'ehad*, one, and *galud*, begotten, and signifies that the Son is *only-begotten*.

Modern scholarship is more rational in its methods, but attaches no less importance to these ancient names, and finds in them weighty evidence on problems of criticism and theology; and before proceeding to more serious matters, we may note a few somewhat exceptional names. As pointed in the present Hebrew text, *Hazarmaveth*[6] and *Azmaveth*[7] have a certain grim suggestiveness. *Hazarmaveth*, court of death, is given as the name of a descendant of Shem. It is, however, probably the name of a place transferred to an eponymous ancestor,

[1] Philo, *De Cong. Quær. Erud. Grat.*, 8.
[2] Hiller's *Onomasticon ap.*, Nestle 11.
[3] vii. 8.
[4] i. 35.
[5] xviii. 15.
[6] i. 20.
[7] viii 36.

and has been identified with *Hadramawt*, a district in the south of Arabia. As, however, *Hadramawt*, is a fertile district of Arabia Felix, the name does not seem very appropriate. On the other hand, *Azmaveth*, "strength of death," would be very suitable for some strong, death-dealing soldier. *Azubah*,[1] "forsaken," the name of Caleb's wife, is capable of a variety of romantic explanations. *Hazelelponi*[2] is remarkable in its mere form; and Ewald's interpretation, "Give shade, Thou who turnest to me Thy countenance," seems rather a cumbrous signification for the name of a daughter of the house of Judah. *Jushab-hesed*,[3] "Mercy will be renewed," as the name of a son of Zerubbabel, doubtless expresses the gratitude and hope of the Jews on their return from Babylon.[4] *Jashubi-lehem*,[5] however, is curious and perplexing. The name has been interpreted "giving bread" or "turning back to Bethlehem," but the text is certainly corrupt, and the passage is one of many into which either the carelessness of scribes or the obscurity of the chronicler's sources has introduced hopeless confusion. But the most remarkable set of names is found in 1 Chron. xxv. 4, where *Giddalti* and *Romantiezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, Mahazioth*, are simply a Hebrew sentence meaning, "I have magnified and exalted help; sitting in distress,[6] I have spoken[6] visions in abundance." We may at once set aside the cynical suggestion that the author lacked names to complete a genealogy and, to save the trouble of inventing them separately, took the first sentence that came to hand and cut it up into suitable lengths, nor is it likely that a father would

[1] ii. 18. [2] iv. 3. [3] iii. 20. [4] Bertheau, i.l. [5] iv. 22.

[6] The translation of these words is not quite certain.

spread the same process over several years and adopt it for his family. This remarkable combination of names is probably due to some misunderstanding of his sources on the part of the chronicler. His parchment rolls must often have been torn and fragmentary, the writing blurred and half illegible; and his attempts to piece together obscure and ragged manuscripts naturally resulted at times in mistakes and confusion.

These examples of interesting etymologies might easily be multiplied; they serve, at any rate, to indicate a rich mine of suggestive teaching. It must, however, be remembered that a name is not necessarily a personal name because it occurs in a genealogy; cities, districts, and tribes mingle freely with persons in these lists. In the same connection we note that the female names are few and far between, and that of those which do occur the "sisters" probably stand for allied and related families, and not for individuals.

As regards Old Testament theology, we may first notice the light thrown by personal names on the relation of the religion of Israel to that of other Semitic peoples. Of the names in these chapters and elsewhere, a large proportion are compounded of one or other of the Divine names. *El* is the first element in *Elishama*, *Eliphelet*, *Eliada*, etc.; it is the second in *Othniel*, *Jehaleleel*, *Asareel*, etc. Similarly *Jehovah* is represented by the initial *Jeho-* in *Jehoshaphat*, *Jehoiakim*, *Jehoram*, etc., by the final *-iah* in *Amaziah*, *Azariah*, *Hezekiah*, etc. It has been calculated that there are a hundred and ninety names[1] beginning or ending with the equivalent of Jehovah, including most of the kings of Judah and many of the kings of Israel. Moreover, some names which have not these prefixes

[1] Nestle, p. 68.

and affixes in their extant form are contractions of older forms which began or ended with a Divine name. Ahaz, for instance, is mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions as Jahuhazi—*i.e.*, Jehoahaz—and Nathan is probably a contracted form of Nethaniah.

There are also numerous compounds of other Divine names. *Zur*, rock, is found in *Pedahzur*,[1] *Shaddai*, A.V. Almighty, in *Ammishaddai*[2]; the two are combined in *Zurishaddai*.[3] *Melech* is a Divine name in *Malchi-ram* and *Malchi-shua*. *Baal* occurs as a Divine name in *Eshbaal* and *Meribbaal*. *Abi*, father, is a Divine name in *Abiram*, *Abinadab*, etc., and probably also *Ahi* in *Ahiram* and *Ammi* in *Amminadab*.[4] Possibly, too, the apparently simple names *Melech*, *Zur*, *Baal*, are contractions of longer forms in which these Divine names were prefixes or affixes.

This use of Divine names is capable of very varied illustration. Modern languages have Christian and Christopher, Emmanuel, Theodosius, Theodora, etc.; names like Hermogenes and Heliogabalus are found in the classical languages. But the practice is specially characteristic of Semitic languages. Mohammedan princes are still called *Abdurrahman*, servant of the Merciful, and *Abdallah*, servant of God; ancient Phœnician kings were named *Ethbaal* and *Abdalonim*, where *alonim* is a plural Divine name, and the *bal* in Hannibal and Hasdrubal = *baal*. The Assyrian and Chaldæan kings were named after the gods Sin, Nebo, Assur, Merodach, *e.g.*, *Sin-akki-irib* (Sennacherib); *Nebuchadnezzar*; *Assur-bani-pal*; *Merodach-baladan*.

Of these Divine names El and Baal are common to Israel and other Semitic peoples, and it has been held

[1] Num. i. 10. [2] Num. i. 12. [3] Num. i. 6. [4] Cf. p. 40.

that the Hebrew personal names preserve traces of polytheism. In any case, however, the Baal-names are comparatively few, and do not necessarily indicate that Israelites worshipped a Baal distinct from Jehovah; they may be relics of a time when Baal (Lord) was a title or equivalent of Jehovah, like the later Adonai. Other possible traces of polytheism are few and doubtful. In Baanah and Resheph we may perhaps find the obscure[1] Phœnician deities Anath and Reshaph. On the whole, Hebrew names as compared, for instance, with Assyrian afford little or no evidence of the prevalence of polytheism.

Another question concerns the origin and use of the name Jehovah. Our lists conclusively prove its free use during the monarchy and its existence under the judges. On the other hand, its apparent presence in Jochebed, the name of the mother of Moses, seems to carry it back beyond Moses. Possibly it was a Divine name peculiar to his family or clan. Its occurrence in *Yahubidi*, a king of Hamath, in the time of Sargon may be due to direct Israelite influence. Hamath had frequent relations with Israel and Judah.

Turning to matters of practical religion, how far do these names help us to understand the spiritual life of ancient Israel? The Israelites made constant use of El and Jehovah in their names, and we have no parallel practice. Were they then so much more religious than we are? Probably in a sense they were. It is true that the etymology and even the original significance of a name in common use are for all practical purposes quickly and entirely forgotten. A man may go through a life-time bearing the name of Christopher and never know its etymological meaning. At Cambridge and

[1] xi. 30; vii. 25 (Nestle).

Oxford sacred names like "Jesus" and "Trinity" are used constantly and familiarly without suggesting anything beyond the colleges so called. The edifying phrase, "God encompasseth us," is altogether lost in the grotesque tavern sign "The Goat and Compasses." Nor can we suppose that the Israelite or the Assyrian often dwelt on the religious significance of the *Jeho-* or *-iah*, the *Nebo*, *Sin*, or *Merodach*, of current proper names. As we have seen, the sense of *-iah*, *-el*, or *Jeho-* was often so little present to men's minds that contractions were formed by omitting them. Possibly because these prefixes and affixes were so common, they came to be taken for granted; it was scarcely necessary to write them, because in any case they would be understood. Probably in historic times *Abi-*, *Ahi-*, and *Ammi-* were no longer recognised as Divine names or titles; and yet the names which could still be recognised as compounded of El and Jehovah must have had their influence on popular feeling. They were part of the religiousness, so to speak, of the ancient East; they symbolised the constant intertwining of religious acts, and words, and thoughts with all the concerns of life. The quality of this ancient religion was very inferior to that of a devout and intelligent modern Christian; it was perhaps inferior to that of Russian peasants belonging to the Greek Church: but ancient religion pervaded life and society more consciously than modern Christianity does; it touched all classes and occasions more directly, if also more mechanically. And, again, these names were not the fossil relics of obsolete habits of thought and feeling, like the names of our churches and colleges; they were the memorials of comparatively recent acts of faith. The name "Elijah" commemorated the

solemn occasion on which a father professed his own faith and consecrated a new-born child to the true God by naming his boy "Jehovah is my God." This name-giving was also a prayer: the child was placed under the protection of the deity whose name it bore. The practice might be tainted with superstition; the name would often be regarded as a kind of amulet; and yet we may believe that it could also serve to express a parent's earnest and simple-minded faith. Modern Englishmen have developed a habit of almost complete reticence and reserve on religious matters, and this habit is illustrated by our choice of proper names. Mary, and Thomas, and James are so familiar that their Scriptural origin is forgotten, and therefore they are tolerated; but the use of distinctively Scriptural Christian names is virtually regarded as bad taste. This reticence is not merely due to increased delicacy of spiritual feeling: it is partly the result of the growth of science and of literary and historical criticism. We have become absorbed in the wonderful revelations of methods and processes; we are fascinated by the ingenious mechanism of nature and society. We have no leisure to detach our thoughts from the machinery and carry them further on to its Maker and Director. Indeed, because there is so much mechanism and because it is so wonderful, we are sometimes asked to believe that the machine made itself. But this is a mere phase in the religious growth of mankind: humanity will tire of some of its new toys, and will become familiar with the rest; deeper needs and instincts will reassert themselves; and men will find themselves nearer in sentiment than they supposed to the ancient people who named their children after their God. In this and other matters the East to-day

is the same as of old; the permanence of its custom is no inapt symbol of the permanence of Divine truth, which revolution and conquest are powerless to change.

> "The East bowed low before the blast
> In patient, deep disdain;
> She let the legions thunder past,
> And plunged in thought again."

But the Christian Church is mistress of a more compelling magic than even Eastern patience and tenacity: out of the storms that threaten her, she draws new energies for service, and learns a more expressive language in which to declare the glory of God.

Let us glance for a moment at the meanings of the group of Divine names given above. We have said that, in addition to *Melech* in *Malchi-*, *Abi*, *Ahi*, and *Ammi* are to be regarded as Divine names. One reason for this is that their use as prefixes is strictly analogous to that of *El* and *Jeho-*. We have *Abijah* and *Ahijah* as well as *Elijah*, *Abiel* and *Ammiel* as well as *Eliel*, *Abiram* and *Ahiram* as well as *Jehoram*; *Ammishaddai* compares with *Zurishaddai*, and *Ammizabad* with *Jehozabad*, nor would it be difficult to add many other examples. If this view be correct, *Ammi* will have nothing to do with the Hebrew word for "people," but will rather be connected with the corresponding Arabic word for "uncle."[1] As the use of such terms as "brother" and "uncle" for Divine names is not consonant with Hebrew theology in its historic period, the names which contain these prefixes must have come down from earlier ages, and were used in later times without any consciousness of their original sense. Probably they were explained by new etymo-

[1] Nestle.

logies more in harmony with the spirit of the times; compare the etymology "father of a multitude of nations" given to Abraham. Even *Abi-*, father, in the early times to which its use as a prefix must be referred, cannot have had the full spiritual meaning which now attaches to it as a Divine title. It probably only signified the ultimate source of life. The disappearance of these religious terms from the common vocabulary and their use in names long after their significance had been forgotten are ordinary phenomena in the development of language and religion. How many of the millions who use our English names for the days of the week ever give a thought to Thor or Freya? Such phenomena have more than an antiquarian interest. They remind us that religious terms, and phrases, and formulæ derive their influence and value from their adaptation to the age which accepts them; and therefore many of them will become unintelligible or even misleading to later generations. Language varies continuously, circumstances change, experience widens, and every age has a right to demand that Divine truth shall be presented in the words and metaphors that give it the clearest and most forcible expression. Many of the simple truths that are most essential to salvation admit of being stated once for all; but dogmatic theology fossilises fast, and the bread of one generation may become a stone to the next.

The history of these names illustrates yet another phenomenon. In some narrow and imperfect sense the early Semitic peoples seem to have called God "Father" and "Brother." Because the terms were limited to a narrow sense, the Israelites grew to a level of religious truth at which they could no longer use them; but as they made yet further progress they came to know more

of what was meant by fatherhood and brotherhood, and gained also a deeper knowledge of God. At length the Church resumed these ancient Semitic terms; and Christians call God "Abba, Father," and speak of the Eternal Son as their elder Brother. And thus sometimes, but not always, an antique phrase may for a time seem unsuitable and misleading, and then again may prove to be the best expression for the newest and fullest truth. Our criticism of a religious formula may simply reveal our failure to grasp the wealth of meaning which its words and symbols can contain.

Turning from these obsolete names to those in common use—*El; Jehovah; Shaddai; Zur; Melech*—probably the prevailing idea popularly associated with them all was that of strength: *El*, strength in the abstract; *Jehovah*, strength shown in permanence and independence; *Shaddai*, the strength that causes terror, the Almighty from whom cometh destruction[1]; *Zur*, rock, the material symbol of strength; *Melech*, king, the possessor of authority. In early times the first and most essential attribute of Deity is power, but with this idea of strength a certain attribute of beneficence is soon associated. The strong God is the Ally of His people; His permanence is the guarantee of their national existence; He destroys their enemies. The rock is a place of refuge; and, again, Jehovah's people may rejoice in the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. The King leads them to battle, and gives them their enemies for a spoil.

[1] Joel i. 15; Isa. xiii. 6. It is not necessary here to discuss either the etymological or the theological history of these words in their earliest usage, nor need we do more than recall the fact that Jehovah was the term in common use as the personal name of the God of Israel, while El was rare and sometimes generic.

We must not, however, suppose that pious Israelites would consciously and systematically discriminate between these names, any more than ordinary Christians do between God, Lord, Father, Christ, Saviour, Jesus. Their usage would be governed by changing currents of sentiment very difficult to understand and explain after the lapse of thousands of years. In the year A.D. 3000, for instance, it will be difficult for the historian of dogmatics to explain accurately why some nineteenth-century Christians preferred to speak of "dear Jesus" and others of "the Christ."

But the simple Divine names reveal comparatively little; much more may be learnt from the numerous compounds they help to form. Some of the more curious have already been noticed, but the real significance of this nomenclature is to be looked for in the more ordinary and natural names. Here, as before, we can only select from the long and varied list. Let us take some of the favourite names and some of the roots most often used, almost always, be it remembered, in combination with Divine names. The different varieties of these sacred names rendered it possible to construct various personal names embodying the same idea. Also the same Divine name might be used either as prefix or affix. For instance, the idea that "God knows" is equally well expressed in the names *Eliada* (El-yada'), *Jediael* (Yada'-el), *Jehoiada* (Jehoyada'), and *Jedaiah* (Yada'-yah). "God remembers" is expressed alike by *Zachariah* and *Jozachar*; "God hears" by *Elishama* (El-shama'), *Samuel* (if for Shama'-el), *Ishmael* (also from Shama'-el), *Shemaiah*, and *Ishmaiah* (*both from* Shama' *and* Yah); "God gives" by *Elnathan*, *Nethaneel*, *Jonathan*, and *Nethaniah*; "God helps" by *Eliezer*, *Azareel*, *Joezer*, and *Azariah*;

"God is gracious" by *Elhanan*, *Hananeel*, *Johanan*, *Hananiah*, *Baal-hanan*, and, for a Carthaginian, *Hannibal*, giving us a curious connection between the Apostle of love, John (Johanan), and the deadly enemy of Rome.

The way in which the changes are rung upon these ideas shows how the ancient Israelites loved to dwell upon them. Nestle reckons that in the Old Testament sixty-one persons have names formed from the root *nathan*, to give; fifty-seven from *shama*, to hear; fifty-six from *'azar*, to help; forty-five from *hanan*, to be gracious; forty-four from *zakhar*, to remember. Many persons, too, bear names from the root *yada'*, to know. The favourite name is *Zechariah*, which is borne by twenty-five different persons.

Hence, according to the testimony of names, the Israelites' favourite ideas about God were that He heard, and knew, and remembered; that He was gracious, and helped men, and gave them gifts: but they loved best to think of Him as God the Giver. Their nomenclature recognises many other attributes, but these take the first place. The value of this testimony is enhanced by its utter unconsciousness and naturalness; it brings us nearer to the average man in his religious moments than any psalm or prophetic utterance. Men's chief interest in God was as the Giver. The idea has proved very permanent; St. James amplifies it: God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. It lies latent in names: Theodosius, Theodore, Theodora, and Dorothea. The other favourite ideas are all related to this. God hears men's prayers, and knows their needs, and remembers them; He is gracious, and helps them by His gifts. Could anything be more pathetic than this artless self-revelation? Men's minds have

little leisure for sin and salvation; they are kept down by the constant necessity of preserving and providing for a bare existence. Their cry to God is like the prayer of Jacob, "If Thou wilt give me bread to eat and raiment to put on!" The very confidence and gratitude that the names express imply periods of doubt and fear, when they said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" times when it seemed to them impossible that God could have heard their prayer or that He knew their misery, else why was there no deliverance? Had God forgotten to be gracious? Did He indeed remember? The names come to us as answers of faith to these suggestions of despair.

Possibly these old-world saints were not more preoccupied with their material needs than most modern Christians. Perhaps it is necessary to believe in a God who rules on earth before we can understand the Father who is in heaven. Does a man really trust in God for eternal life if he cannot trust Him for daily bread? But in any case these names provide us with very comprehensive formulæ, which we are at liberty to apply as freely as we please: the God who knows, and hears, and remembers, who is gracious, and helps men, and gives them gifts. To begin with, note how in a great array of Old Testament names God is the Subject, Actor, and Worker; the supreme facts of life are God and God's doings, not man and man's doings, what God is to man, not what man is to God. This is a foreshadowing of the Christian doctrines of grace and of the Divine sovereignty. And again we are left to fill in the objects of the sentences for ourselves: God hears, and remembers, and gives—what? All that we have to say to Him and all that we are capable of receiving from Him.

CHAPTER II

HEREDITY

1 CHRON. i.–ix.

IT has been said that Religion is the great discoverer of truth, while Science follows her slowly and after a long interval. Heredity, so much discussed just now, is sometimes treated as if its principles were a great discovery of the present century. Popular science is apt to ignore history and to mistake a fresh nomenclature for an entirely new system of truth, and yet the immense and far-reaching importance of heredity has been one of the commonplaces of thought ever since history began. Science has been anticipated, not merely by religious feeling, but by a universal instinct. In the old world political and social systems have been based upon the recognition of the principle of heredity, and religion has sanctioned such recognition. Caste in India is a religious even more than a social institution; and we use the term figuratively in reference to ancient and modern life, even when the institution has not formally existed. Without the aid of definite civil or religious law the force of sentiment and circumstances suffices to establish an informal system of caste. Thus the feudal aristocracy and guilds of the Middle Ages were not without their rough counterparts in the Old Testament. Moreover, the local divisions of the Hebrew kingdoms corresponded in theory, at any rate,

to blood relationships; and the tribe, the clan, and the family had even more fixity and importance than now belong to the parish or the municipality. A man's family history or genealogy was the ruling factor in determining his home, his occupation, and his social position. In the chronicler's time this was especially the case with the official ministers of religion, the Temple establishment to which he himself belonged. The priests, the Levites, the singers, and doorkeepers formed castes in the strict sense of the word. A man's birth definitely assigned him to one of these classes, to which none but the members of certain families could belong.

But the genealogies had a deeper significance. Israel was Jehovah's chosen people, His son, to whom special privileges were guaranteed by solemn covenant. A man's claim to share in this covenant depended on his genuine Israelite descent, and the proof of such descent was an authentic genealogy. In these chapters the chronicler has taken infinite pains to collect pedigrees from all available sources and to construct a complete set of genealogies exhibiting the lines of descent of the families of Israel. His interest in this research was not merely antiquarian: he was investigating matters of the greatest social and religious importance to all the members of the Jewish community, and especially to his colleagues and friends in the Temple service. These chapters, which seem to us so dry and useless, were probably regarded by the chronicler's contemporaries as the most important part of his work. The preservation or discovery of a genealogy was almost a matter of life and death. Witness the episode in Ezra and Nehemiah[1]: "And of the priests: the

[1] Ezra ii. 61–63; Neh. vii. 63–65.

children of Hobaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, which took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name. These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found; therefore they were deemed polluted and put from the priesthood. And the governor said unto them that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim." Cases like these would stimulate our author's enthusiasm. As he turned over dusty receptacles, and unrolled frayed parchments, and painfully deciphered crabbed and faded script, he would be excited by the hope of discovering some mislaid genealogy that would restore outcasts to their full status and privileges as Israelites and priests. Doubtless he had already acquired in some measure the subtle exegesis and minute casuistry that were the glory of later Rabbinism. Ingenious interpretation of obscure writing or the happy emendation of half-obliterated words might lend opportune aid in the recovery of a genealogy. On the other hand, there were vested interests ready to protest against the too easy acceptance of new claims. The priestly families of undoubted descent from Aaron would not thank a chronicler for reviving lapsed rights to a share in the offices and revenues of the Temple. This part of our author's task was as delicate as it was important.

We will now briefly consider the genealogies in these chapters in the order in which they are given. Chap. i. contains genealogies of the patriarchal period selected from Genesis. The existing races of the world are all traced back through Shem, Ham, and Japheth to Noah, and through him to Adam. The

chronicler thus accepts and repeats the doctrine of Genesis that God made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.[1] All mankind, "Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman,"[2] were alike descended from Noah, who was saved from the Flood by the special care of God; from Enoch, who walked with God; from Adam, who was created by God in His own image and likeness. The Israelites did not claim, like certain Greek clans, to be the descendants of a special god of their own, or, like the Athenians, to have sprung miraculously from sacred soil. Their genealogies testified that not merely Israelite nature, but human nature, is moulded on a Divine pattern. These apparently barren lists of names enshrine the great principles of the universal brotherhood of men and the universal Fatherhood of God. The chronicler wrote when the broad universalism of the prophets was being replaced by the hard exclusiveness of Judaism; and yet, perhaps unconsciously, he reproduces the genealogies which were to be one weapon of St. Paul in his struggle with that exclusiveness. The opening chapters of Genesis and Chronicles are among the foundations of the catholicity of the Church of Christ.

For the antediluvian period only the Sethite genealogy is given. The chronicler's object was simply to give the origin of existing races; and the descendants of Cain were omitted, as entirely destroyed by the Flood.

Following the example of Genesis, the chronicler gives the genealogies of other races at the points at which they diverged from the ancestral line of Israel, and then continues the family history of the chosen race. In this way the descendants of Japheth and

[1] Acts xvii. 26. [2] Col. iii. 11.

Ham, the non-Abrahamic Semites, the Ishmaelites, the sons of Keturah, and the Edomites are successively mentioned.

The relations of Israel with Edom were always close and mostly hostile. The Edomites had taken advantage of the overthrow of the southern kingdom to appropriate the south of Judah, and still continued to occupy it. The keen interest felt by the chronicler in Edom is shown by the large space devoted to the Edomites. The close contiguity of the Jews and Idumæans tended to promote mutual intercourse between them, and even threatened an eventual fusion of the two peoples. As a matter of fact, the Idumæan Herods became rulers of Judæa. To guard against such dangers to the separateness of the Jewish people, the chronicler emphasises the historical distinction of race between them and the Edomites.

From the beginning of the second chapter onwards the genealogies are wholly occupied with Israelites. The author's special interest in Judah is at once manifested. After giving the list of the twelve Patriarchs he devotes two and a half chapters to the families of Judah. Here again the materials have been mostly obtained from the earlier historical books. They are, however, combined with more recent traditions, so that in this chapter matter from different sources is pieced together in a very confusing fashion. One source of this confusion was the principle that the Jewish community could only consist of families of genuine Israelite descent. Now a large number of the returned exiles traced their descent to two brothers, Caleb and Jerahmeel; but in the older narratives Caleb and Jerahmeel are not Israelites. Caleb is a Kenizzite,[1] and his de-

[1] Josh. xiv. 6.

scendants and those of Jerahmeel appear in close connection with the Kenites.[1] Even in this chapter certain of the Calebites are called Kenites and connected in some strange way with the Rechabites.[2] Though at the close of the monarchy the Calebites and Jerahmeelites had become an integral part of the tribe of Judah, their separate origin had not been forgotten, and Caleb and Jerahmeel had not been included in the Israelite genealogies. But after the Exile men came to feel more and more strongly that a common faith implied unity of race. Moreover, the practical unity of the Jews with these Kenizzites overbore the dim and fading memory of ancient tribal distinctions. Jews and Kenizzites had shared the Captivity, the Exile, and the Return; they worked, and fought, and worshipped side by side; and they were to all intents and purposes one nation, alike the people of Jehovah. This obvious and important practical truth was expressed as such truths were then wont to be expressed. The children of Caleb and Jerahmeel were finally and formally adopted into the chosen race. Caleb and Jerahmeel are no longer the sons of Jephunneh the Kenizzite; they are the sons of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah.[3] A new genealogy was formed as a recognition rather than an explanation of accomplished facts.

Of the section containing the genealogies of Judah, the lion's share is naturally given to the house of David, to which a part of the second chapter and the whole of the third are devoted.

[1] 1 Sam. xxvii. 10.

[2] Ver. 55.

[3] The occurrence of Caleb the son of Jephunneh in iv. 15, vi. 56, in no way militates against this view: the chronicler, like other redactors, is simply inserting borrowed material without correcting it. *Chelubai* in ii. 9 stands for *Caleb*; cf. ii. 18.

Next follow genealogies of the remaining tribes, those of Levi and Benjamin being by far the most complete. Chap. vi., which is devoted to Levi, affords evidence of the use by the chronicler of independent and sometimes inconsistent sources, and also illustrates his special interest in the priesthood and the Temple choir. A list of high-priests from Aaron to Ahimaaz is given twice over (vv. 4–8 and 49–53), but only one line of high-priests is recognised, the house of Zadok, whom Josiah's reforms had made the one priestly family in Israel. Their ancient rivals the high-priests of the house of Eli are as entirely ignored as the antediluvian Cainites. The existing high-priestly dynasty had been so long established that these other priests of Saul and David seemed no longer to have any significance for the religion of Israel.

The pedigree of the three Levitical families of Gershom, Kohath, and Merari is also given twice over: in vv. 16–30 and 31–49. The former pedigree begins with the sons of Levi, and proceeds to their descendants; the latter begins with the founders of the guilds of singers, Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, and traces back their genealogies to Kohath, Gershom, and Merari respectively. But the pedigrees do not agree; compare, for instance, the lists of the Kohathites:—

22–24.	36–38.
Kohath	Kohath
Amminadab	*Izhar*
Korah	Korah
Assir	
Elkanah	
Ebiasaph	Ebiasaph
Assir	Assir

22–24.	36–38
Tahath	Tahath
Uriel	*Zephaniah*
Uzziah	*Azariah*
Shaul	etc.

We have here one of many illustrations of the fact that the chronicler used materials of very different value. To attempt to prove the absolute consistency of all his genealogies would be mere waste of time. It is by no means certain that he himself supposed them to be consistent. The frank juxtaposition of varying lists of ancestors rather suggests that he was prompted by a scholarly desire to preserve for his readers all available evidence of every kind.

In reading the genealogies of the tribe of Benjamin, it is specially interesting to find that in the Jewish community of the Restoration there were families tracing their descent through Mephibosheth and Jonathan to Saul.[1] Apparently the chronicler and his contemporaries shared this special interest in the fortunes of a fallen dynasty, for the genealogy is given twice over. These circumstances are the more striking because in the actual history of Chronicles Saul is all but ignored.

The rest of the ninth chapter deals with the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the ministry of the Temple after the return from the Captivity, and is partly identical with sections of Ezra and Nehemiah. It closes the family history, as it were, of Israel, and its position indicates the standpoint and ruling interests of the chronicler.

[1] viii. 33–40; ix. 35–44. We have used Mephibosheth as more familiar, but Chronicles reads Meribbaal, which is more correct.

Thus the nine opening chapters of genealogies and kindred matter strike the key-notes of the whole book. Some are personal and professional; some are religious. On the one hand, we have the origin of existing families and institutions; on the other hand, we have the election of the tribe of Judah and the house of David, of the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron.

Let us consider first the hereditary character of the Jewish religion and priesthood. Here, as elsewhere, the formal doctrine only recognised and accepted actual facts. The conditions which received the sanction of religion were first imposed by the force of circumstances. In primitive times, if there was to be any religion at all, it had to be national; if God was to be worshipped at all, His worship was necessarily national, and He became in some measure a national God. Sympathies are limited by knowledge and by common interest. The ordinary Israelite knew very little of any other people than his own. There was little international comity in primitive times, and nations were slow to recognise that they had common interests. It was difficult for an Israelite to believe that his beloved Jehovah, in whom he had been taught to trust, was also the God of the Arabs and Syrians, who periodically raided his crops, and cattle, and slaves, and sometimes carried off his children, or of the Chaldæans, who made deliberate and complete arrangements for plundering the whole country, rasing its cities to the ground, and carrying away the population into distant exile. By a supreme act of faith, the prophets claimed the enemies and oppressors of Israel as instruments of the will of Jehovah, and the chronicler's genealogies show that he shared this faith; but it was still inevitable that the Jews should look out upon the world at

large from the standpoint of their own national interests and experience. Jehovah was God of heaven and earth; but Israelites knew Him through the deliverance He had wrought for Israel, the punishments He had inflicted on her sins, and the messages He had entrusted to her prophets. As far as their knowledge and practical experience went, they knew Him as the God of Israel. The course of events since the fall of Samaria narrowed still further the local associations of Hebrew worship.

> "God was wroth,
> And greatly abhorred Israel,
> So that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh,
> The tent which He placed among men;
> * * * * *
> He refused the tent of Joseph,
> And chose not the tribe of Ephraim,
> But chose the tribe of Judah,
> The Mount Zion which He loved:
> And He built His sanctuary like the heights,
> Like the earth, which He hath established for ever."[1]

We are doubtless right in criticising those Jews whose limitations led them to regard Jehovah as a kind of personal possession, the inheritance of their own nation, and not of other peoples. But even here we can only blame their negations. Jehovah *was* their inheritance and personal possession; but then He was also the inheritance of other nations. This Jewish heresy is by no means extinct: white men do not always believe that their God is equally the God of the negro; Englishmen are inclined to think that God is the God of England in a more especial way than He is the God of France. When we discourse concerning God in history, we

[1] Psalm lxxviii. 59, 60, 67–69.

mostly mean our own history. We can see the hand of Providence in the wreck of the Armada and the overthrow of Napoleon; but we are not so ready to recognise in the same Napoleon the Divine instrument that created a new Europe by relieving her peoples from cruel and degrading tyranny. We scarcely realise that God cares as much for the Continent as He does for our island.

We have great and perhaps sufficient excuses, but we must let the Jews have the benefit of them. God is as much the God of one nation as of another; but He fulfils Himself to different nations in different ways, by a various providential discipline. Each people is bound to believe that God has specially adapted His dealings to its needs, nor can we be surprised if men forget or fail to observe that God has done no less for their neighbours. Each nation rightly regards its religious ideas, and life, and literature as a precious inheritance peculiarly its own; and it should not be too severely blamed for being ignorant that other nations have their inheritance also. Such considerations largely justify the interest in heredity shown by the chronicler's genealogies. On the positive, practical side, religion *is* largely a matter of heredity, and ought to be. The Christian sacrament of baptism is a continual profession of this truth: our children are "clean"; they are within the covenant of grace; we claim for them the privileges of the Church to which we belong. That was also part of the meaning of the genealogies.

In the broad field of social and religious life the problems of heredity are in some ways less complicated than in the more exact discussions of physical science. Practical effects can be considered without attempting an accurate analysis of causes. Family history not

only determines physical constitution, mental gifts, and moral character, but also fixes for the most part country, home, education, circumstances, and social position. All these were a man's inheritance more peculiarly in Israel than with us; and in many cases in Israel a man was often trained to inherit a family profession. Apart from the ministry of the Temple, we read of a family of craftsmen, of other families that were potters, of others who dwelt with the king for his work, and of the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen.[1] Religion is largely involved in the manifold inheritance which a man receives from his fathers. His birth determines his religious education, the examples of religious life set before him, the forms of worship in which as a child he takes part. Most men live and die in the religion of their childhood; they worship the God of their fathers; Romanist remains Romanist: Protestant remains Protestant. They may fail to grasp any living faith, or may lose all interest in religion; but such religion as most men have is part of their inheritance. In the Israel of the chronicler faith and devotion to God were almost always and entirely inherited. They were part of the great debt which a man owed to his fathers.

The recognition of these facts should tend to foster our humility and reverence, to encourage patriotism and philanthropy. We are the creatures and debtors of the past, though we are slow to own our obligations. We have nothing that we have not received; but we are apt to consider ourselves self-made men, the architects and builders of our own fortunes, who have the right to be self-satisfied, self-assertive, and selfish. The heir of all the ages, in the full vigour of youth, takes his place

[1] iv. 14, 21–23.

in the foremost ranks of time, and marches on in the happy consciousness of profound and multifarious wisdom, immense resources, and magnificent opportunity. He forgets or even despises the generations of labour and anguish that have built up for him his great inheritance. The genealogies are a silent protest against such insolent ingratitude. They remind us that in bygone days a man derived his gifts and received his opportunities from his ancestors; they show us men as the links in a chain, tenants for life, as it were, of our estate, called upon to pay back with interest to the future the debt which they have incurred to the past. We see that the chain is a long one, with many links; and the slight estimate we are inclined to put upon the work of individuals in each generation recoils upon our own pride. We also are but individuals of a generation that is only one of the thousands needed to work out the Divine purpose for mankind. We are taught the humility that springs from a sense of obligation and responsibility.

We learn reverence for the workers and achievements of the past, and most of all for God. We are reminded of the scale of the Divine working :—

> "A thousand years in Thy sight
> Are but as yesterday when it is past
> And as a watch in the night."

A genealogy is a brief and pointed reminder that God has been working through all the countless generations behind us. The bare series of names is an expressive diagram of His mighty process. Each name in the earlier lists stands for a generation or even for several generations. The genealogies go back into dim, prehistoric periods; they suggest a past too remote for

our imagining. And yet they take us back to Adam, to the very beginning of human life. From that beginning, however many thousands or tens of thousands of years ago, the life of man has been sacred, the object of the Divine care and love, the instrument of the Divine purpose.

Later on we see the pedigree of our race dividing into countless branches, all of which are represented in this sacred diagram of humanity. The Divine working not only extends over all time, but also embraces all the complicated circumstances and relationships of the families of mankind. These genealogies suggest a lesson probably not intended by the chronicler. We recognise the unique character of the history of Israel, but in some measure we discern in this one full and detailed narrative of the chosen people a type of the history of every race. Others had not the election of Israel, but each had its own vocation. God's power, and wisdom, and love are manifested in the history of one chosen people on a scale commensurate with our limited faculties, so that we may gain some faint idea of the marvellous providence in *all* history of the Father from whom *every* family in heaven and on earth is named.

Another principle closely allied to heredity and also discussed in modern times is the solidarity of the race. Humanity is supposed to possess something akin to a common consciousness, personality, or individuality. Such a quality evidently becomes more intense as we narrow its scope from the race to the nation, the clan, and the family; it has its roots in family relationships. Tribal, national, humanitarian feelings indicate that the larger societies have taken upon themselves something of the character of the

family. Thus the common feelings and mutual sympathies of mankind are due ultimately to blood relationship. The genealogies that set forth family histories are the symbols of this brotherhood or solidarity of our race. The chart of converging lines of ancestors in Israel carried men's minds back from the separate families to their common ancestor; again, the ancestry of ancestors led back to a still earlier common origin, and the process continued till all the lines met in Noah. Each stage of the process enlarged the range of every man's kinship, and broadened the natural area of mutual help and affection. It is true that the Jews failed to learn this larger lesson from their genealogies, but within their own community they felt intensely the bond of kinship and brotherhood. Modern patriotism reproduces the strong Jewish national feeling, and our humanitarianism is beginning to extend it to the whole world. By this time the facts of heredity have been more carefully studied and are better understood. If we drew up typical genealogies now, they would more fully and accurately represent the mutual relationships of our people. As far as they go, the chronicler's genealogies form a clear and instructive diagram of the mutual dependence of man on man and family on family. The value of the diagram does not require the accuracy of the actual names any more than the validity of Euclid requires the actual existence of triangles called A B C, D E F. These genealogies are in any case a true symbol of the facts of family relations; but they are drawn, so to speak, in one dimension only, backwards and forwards in time. Yet the real family life exists in three dimensions. There are numerous cross-relations, cousinship of all degrees, as well as

sonship and brotherhood. A man has not merely his male ancestors in the directly ascending line—father, grandfather, great-grandfather, etc.—but he has female ancestors as well. By going back three or four generations a man is connected with an immense number of cousins; and if the complete network of ten or fifteen generations could be worked out, it would probably show some blood bond throughout a whole nation. Thus the ancestral roots of a man's life and character have wide ramifications in the former generations of his people. The further we go back the larger is the element of ancestry common to the different individuals of the same community. The chronicler's genealogies only show us individuals as links in a set of chains. The more complete genealogical scheme would be better illustrated by the ganglia of the nervous system, each of which is connected by numerous nerve fibres with the other ganglia. The Church has been compared to the body, "which is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body." Humanity, by its natural kinship, is also such a body; the nation is still more truly "one body." Patriotism and humanity are instincts as natural and as binding as those of the family; and the genealogies express or symbolise the wider family ties, that they may commend the virtues and enforce the duties that arise out of these ties.

Before closing this chapter something may be said on one or two special points. Women are virtually ignored in these genealogies, a fact that rather indicates a failure to recognise their influence than the absence of such influence. Here and there a woman is mentioned for some special reason. For instance, the names of Zeruiah and Abigail are inserted in order to

show that Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, together with Amasa, were all cousins of David. The same keen interest in David leads the chronicler to record the names of his wives. It is noteworthy that of the four women who are mentioned in St. Matthew's genealogy of our Lord only two—Tamar and Bath-shua (*i.e.*, Bath-sheba)—are mentioned here. Probably St. Matthew was careful to complete the list because Rahab and Ruth, like Tamar and possibly Bath-sheba, were foreigners, and their names in the genealogy indicated a connection between Christ and the Gentiles, and served to emphasise His mission to be the Saviour of the world.

Again, much caution is necessary in applying any principle of heredity. A genealogy, as we have seen, suggests our dependence in many ways upon our ancestry. But a man's relations to his kindred are many and complicated; a quality, for instance, may be latent for one or more generations and then reappear, so that to all appearance a man inherits from his grandfather or from a more remote ancestor rather than from his father or mother. Conversely the presence of certain traits of character in a child does not show that any corresponding tendency has necessarily been active in the life of either parent. Neither must the influence of circumstances be confounded with that of heredity. Moreover, very large allowance must be made for our ignorance of the laws that govern the human will, an ignorance that will often baffle our attempts to find in heredity any simple explanation of men's characters and actions. Thomas Fuller has a quaint "Scripture observation" that gives an important practical application of these principles:—

"Lord, I find the genealogy of my Saviour strangely

chequered with four remarkable changes in four immediate generations:

"1. 'Rehoboam begat Abiam'; that is, a bad father begat a bad son.

"2. 'Abiam begat Asa'; that is, a bad father a good son.

"3. 'Asa begat Jehosaphat'; that is, a good father a good son.

"4. 'Jehosaphat begat Joram'; that is, a good father a bad son.

"I see, Lord, from hence that my father's piety cannot be entailed; that is bad news for me. But I see also that actual impiety is not always hereditary; that is good news for my son."

CHAPTER III

STATISTICS

STATISTICS play an important part in Chronicles and in the Old Testament generally. To begin with, there are the genealogies and other lists of names, such as the lists of David's counsellors and the roll of honour of his mighty men. The chronicler specially delights in lists of names, and most of all in lists of Levitical choristers. He gives us lists of the orchestras and choirs who performed when the Ark was brought to Zion[1] and at Hezekiah's passover,[2] also a list of Levites whom Jehoshaphat sent out to teach in Judah.[3] No doubt family pride was gratified when the chronicler's contemporaries and friends read the names of their ancestors in connection with great events in the history of their religion. Possibly they supplied him with the information from which these lists were compiled. An incidental result of the celibacy of the Romanist clergy has been to render ancient ecclesiastical genealogies impossible; modern clergymen cannot trace their descent to the monks who landed with Augustine. Our genealogies might enable a historian to construct lists of the combatants at Agincourt and Hastings; but the Crusades are the only wars of the

[1] 1 Chron. xv.
[2] Cf. 2 Chron. xxix. 12 and xxx. 22.
[3] 2 Chron. xvii. 8.

Church militant for which modern pedigrees could furnish a muster-roll.

We find also in the Old Testament the specifications and subscription-lists for the Tabernacle and for Solomon's temple.[1] These statistics, however, are not furnished for the second Temple, probably for the same reason that in modern subscription-lists the donors of shillings and half-crowns are to be indicated by initials, or described as "friends" and "sympathisers," or massed together under the heading "smaller sums."

The Old Testament is also rich in census returns and statements as to the numbers of armies and of the divisions of which they were composed. There are the returns of the census taken twice in the wilderness and accounts of the numbers of the different families who came from Babylon with Zerubbabel and later on with Ezra; there is a census of the Levites in David's time according to their several families[2]; there are the numbers of the tribal contingents that came to Hebron to make David king,[3] and much similar information.

Statistics therefore occupy a conspicuous position in the inspired record of Divine revelation, and yet we often hesitate to connect such terms as "inspiration" and "revelation" with numbers, and names, and details of civil and ecclesiastical organisation. We are afraid lest any stress laid on purely accidental details should distract men's attention from the eternal essence of the Gospel, lest any suggestion that the certainty of Christian truth is dependent on the accuracy of these statistics should become a stumbling-block and destroy

[1] Exod. xxv–xxxix.; 1 Kings vi.; 1 Chron. xxix.; 2 Chron. iii., v.
[2] 1 Chron. xv. 4–10.
[3] 1 Chron. xii. 23–37.

the faith of some. Concerning such matters there have been many foolish questions of genealogies, profane and vain babblings, which have increased unto more ungodliness. Quite apart from these, even in the Old Testament a sanctity attaches to the number seven, but there is no warrant for any considerable expenditure of time and thought upon mystical arithmetic. A symbolism runs through the details of the building, furniture, and ritual alike of the Tabernacle and the Temple, and this symbolism possesses a legitimate religious significance; but its exposition is not specially suggested by the book of Chronicles. The exposition of such symbolism is not always sufficiently governed by a sense of proportion. Ingenuity in supplying subtle interpretations of minute details often conceals the great truths which the symbols are really intended to enforce. Moreover, the sacred writers did not give statistics merely to furnish materials for Cabbala and Gematria or even to serve as theological types and symbols. Sometimes their purpose was more simple and practical. If we knew all the history of the Tabernacle and Temple subscription-lists, we should doubtless find that they had been used to stimulate generous gifts towards the erection of the second Temple. Preachers for building funds can find abundance of suitable texts in Exodus, Kings, and Chronicles.

But Biblical statistics are also examples in accuracy and thoroughness of information, and recognitions of the more obscure and prosaic manifestations of the higher life. Indeed, in these and other ways the Bible gives an anticipatory sanction to the exact sciences.

The mention of accuracy in connection with Chronicles may be received by some readers with a contemptuous smile. But we are indebted to the chronicler for exact

and full information about the Jews who returned from Babylon; and in spite of the extremely severe judgment passed upon Chronicles by many critics, we may still venture to believe that the chronicler's statistics are as accurate as his knowledge and critical training rendered possible. He may sometimes give figures obtained by calculation from uncertain data, but such a practice is quite consistent with honesty and a desire to supply the best available information. Modern scholars are quite ready to present us with figures as to the membership of the Christian Church under Antoninus Pius or Constantine; and some of these figures are not much more probable than the most doubtful in Chronicles. All that is necessary to make the chronicler's statistics an example to us is that they should be the monument of a conscientious attempt to tell the truth, and this they undoubtedly are.

This Biblical example is the more useful because statistics are often evil spoken of, and they have no outward attractiveness to shield them from popular prejudice. We are told that "nothing is so false as statistics," and that "figures will prove anything"; and the polemic is sustained by works like *Hard Times* and the awful example of Mr. Gradgrind. Properly understood, these proverbs illustrate the very general impatience of any demand for exact thought and expression. If "figures" will prove anything, so will texts.

Though this popular prejudice cannot be altogether ignored, yet it need not be taken too seriously. The opposite principle, when stated, will at once be seen to be a truism. For it amounts to this: exact and comprehensive knowledge is the basis of a right understanding of history, and is a necessary condition of right action. This principle is often neglected because

it is obvious. Yet, to illustrate it from our author, a knowledge of the size and plan of the Temple greatly adds to the vividness of our pictures of Hebrew religion. We apprehend later Jewish life much more clearly with the aid of the statistics as to the numbers, families, and settlements of the returning exiles; and similarly the account-books of the bailiff of an English estate in the fourteenth century are worth several hundred pages of contemporary theology. These considerations may encourage those who perform the thankless task of compiling the statistics, subscription-lists, and balance-sheets of missionary and philanthropic societies. The zealous and intelligent historian of Christian life and service will need these dry records to enable him to understand his subject, and the highest literary gifts may be employed in the eloquent exposition of these apparently uninteresting facts and figures. Moreover, upon the accuracy of these records depends the possibility of determining a true course for the future. Neither societies nor individuals, for instance, can afford to live beyond their income without knowing it.

Statistics, too, are the only form in which many acts of service can be recognised and recorded. Literature can only deal with typical instances, and naturally it selects the more dramatic. The missionary report can only tell the story of a few striking conversions; it may give the history of the exceptional self-denial involved in one or two of its subscriptions; for the rest we must be content with tables and subscription-lists. But these dry statistics represent an infinitude of patience and self-denial, of work and prayer, of Divine grace and blessing. The city missionary may narrate his experiences with a few inquirers and penitents, but the great bulk of his work can only be

recorded in the statement of visits paid and services conducted. We are tempted sometimes to disparage these statements, to ask how many of the visits and services had any result; we are impatient sometimes because Christian work is estimated by any such numerical line and measure. No doubt the method has many defects, and must not be used too mechanically; but we cannot give it up without ignoring altogether much earnest and successful labour.

Our chronicler's interest in statistics lays healthy emphasis on the practical character of religion. There is a danger of identifying spiritual force with literary and rhetorical gifts; to recognise the religious value of statistics is the most forcible protest against such identification. The permanent contribution of any age to religious thought will naturally take a literary form, and the higher the literary qualities of religious writing, the more likely it is to survive. Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan have probably exercised a more powerful direct religious influence on subsequent generations than all the theologians of the seventeenth century. But the supreme service of the Church in any age is its influence on its own generation, by which it moulds the generation immediately following. That influence can only be estimated by a careful study of all possible information, and especially of statistics. We cannot assign mathematical values to spiritual effects and tabulate them like Board of Trade returns; but real spiritual movements will before long have practical issues, that can be heard, and seen, and felt, and even admit of being put into tables. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth"[1];

[1] John iii. 8.

and yet the boughs and the corn bend before the wind, and the ships are carried across the sea to their desired haven. Tables may be drawn up of the tonnage and the rate of sailing. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. You cannot tell when and how God breathes upon the soul; but if the Divine Spirit be indeed at work in any society, there will be fewer crimes and quarrels, less scandal, and more deeds of charity. We may justly suspect a revival which has no effect upon the statistical records of national life. Subscription-lists are very imperfect tests of enthusiasm, but any widespread Christian fervour would be worth little if it did not swell subscription-lists.

Chronicles is not the most important witness to a sympathetic relationship between the Bible and exact science. The first chapter of Genesis is the classic example of the appropriation by an inspired writer of the scientific spirit and method. Some chapters in Job show a distinctly scientific interest in natural phenomena. Moreover, the direct concern of Chronicles is in the religious aspects of social science. And yet there is a patient accumulation of data with no obvious dramatic value: names, dates, numbers, specifications, and ritual which do not improve the literary character of the narrative. This conscientious recording of dry facts, this noting down of anything and everything that connects with the subject, is closely akin to the initial processes of the inductive sciences. True, the chronicler's interests are in some directions narrowed by personal and professional feeling; but within these limits he is anxious to make a complete record, which, as we have seen, sometimes leads to repetition. Now inductive science is based on unlimited statistics. The astronomer and biologist share the chronicler's appetite

for this kind of mental food. The lists in Chronicles are few and meagre compared to the records of Greenwich Observatory or the volumes which contain the data of biology or sociology; but the chronicler becomes in a certain sense the forerunner of Darwin, Spencer, and Galton. The differences are indeed immense. The interval of two thousand odd years between the ancient annalist and the modern scientists has not been thrown away. In estimating the value of evidence and interpreting its significance, the chronicler was a mere child compared with his modern successors. His aims and interests were entirely different from theirs. But yet he was moved by a spirit which they may be said to inherit. His careful collection of facts, even his tendency to read the ideas and institutions of his own time into ancient history, are indications of a reverence for the past and of an anxiety to base ideas and action upon a knowledge of that past. This foreshadows the reverence of modern science for experience, its anxiety to base its laws and theories upon observation of what has actually occurred. The principle that the past determines and interprets the present and the future lies at the root of the theological attitude of the most conservative minds and the scientific work of the most advanced thinkers. The conservative spirit, like the chronicler, is apt to suffer its inherited prepossessions and personal interests to hinder a true observation and understanding of the past. But the chronicler's opportunities and experience were narrow indeed compared with those of theological students to-day; and we have every right to lay stress on the progress which he had achieved and the onward path that it indicated rather than on the yet more advanced stages which still lay beyond his horizon.

CHAPTER IV

FAMILY TRADITIONS

1 Chron. i. 10, 19, 46; ii. 3, 7, 34; iv. 9, 10, 18, 22, 27, 34–43; v. 10, 18–22; vii. 21–23; viii. 13.

CHRONICLES is a miniature Old Testament, and may have been meant as a handbook for ordinary people, who had no access to the whole library of sacred writings. It contains nothing corresponding to the books of Wisdom or the apocalyptic literature; but all the other types of Old Testament literature are represented. There are genealogies, statistics, ritual, history, psalms, and prophecies. The interest shown by Chronicles in family traditions harmonises with the stress laid by the Hebrew Scriptures upon family life. The other historical books are largely occupied with the family history of the Patriarchs, of Moses, of Jephthah, Gideon, Samson, Saul, and David. The chronicler intersperses his genealogies with short anecdotes about the different families and tribes. Some of these are borrowed from the older books; but others are peculiar to our author, and were doubtless obtained by him from the family records and traditions of his contemporaries. The statements that "Nimrod began to be mighty upon the earth"[1]; that "the name of one" of Eber's sons "was Peleg, because in his days the

[1] i. 10.

earth was divided"[1]; and that Hadad "smote Moab in the field of Midian,"[2] are borrowed from Genesis. As he omits events much more important and more closely connected with the history of Israel, and gives no account of Babel, or of Abraham, or of the conquest of Canaan, these little notes are probably retained by accident, because at times the chronicler copied his authorities somewhat mechanically. It was less trouble to take the genealogies as they stood than to exercise great care in weeding out everything but the bare names.

In one instance,[3] however, the chronicler has erased a curious note to a genealogy in Genesis. A certain Anah is mentioned both in Genesis and Chronicles among the Horites, who inhabited Mount Seir before it was conquered by Edom. Most of us, in reading the Authorised Version, have wondered what historical or religious interest secured a permanent record for the fact that "Anah found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father." A possible solution seemed to be that this note was preserved as the earliest reference to the existence of mules, which animals played an important part in the social life of Palestine; but the Revised Version sets aside this explanation by substituting "hot springs" for "mules," and as these hot springs are only mentioned here, the passage becomes a greater puzzle than ever. The chronicler could hardly overlook this curious piece of information, but he naturally felt that this obscure archæological note about the aboriginal Horites did not fall within the scope of his work. On the other

[1] i. 19. [2] i. 46.
[3] Cf. Gen. xxxvi. 24 and 1 Chron. i. 40.

hand, the tragic fates of Er and Achar[1] had a direct genealogical significance. They are referred to in order to explain why the lists contain no descendants of these members of the tribe of Judah. The notes to these names illustrate the more depressing aspects of history. The men who lived happy, honourable lives can be mentioned one after another without any comment; but even the compiler of pedigrees pauses to note the crimes and misfortunes that broke the natural order of life. The annals of old families dwell with melancholy pride on murders, and fatal duels, and suicides. History, like an ancient mansion, is haunted with unhappy ghosts. Yet our interest in tragedy is a testimony to the blessedness of life; comfort and enjoyment are too monotonously common to be worth recording, but we are attracted and excited by exceptional instances of suffering and sin.

Let us turn to the episodes of family life only found in Chronicles. They may mostly be arranged in little groups of two or three, and some of the groups present us with an interesting contrast.

We learn from ii. 34–41 and iv. 18 that two Jewish families traced their descent from Egyptian ancestors. Sheshan, according to Chronicles, was eighth in descent from Judah and fifth from Jerahmeel, the brother of Caleb. Having daughters, but no son, he gave one of his daughters in marriage to an Egyptian slave named Jarha. The descendants of this union are traced for thirteen generations. Genealogies, however, are not always complete; and our other data do not suffice to determine even approximately the date of this marriage. But the five generations between Jerahmeel and Sheshan indicate a period long after the

[1] *I.e.*, Achan (ii. 3, 7).

Exodus; and as Egypt plays no recorded part in the history of Israel between the Exodus and the reign of Solomon, the marriage may have taken place under the monarchy. The story is a curious parallel to that of Joseph, with the parts of Israelite and Egyptian reversed. God is no respecter of persons; it is not only when the desolate and afflicted in strange lands belong to the chosen people that Jehovah relieves and delivers them. It is true of the Egyptian, as well as of the Israelite, that "the Lord maketh poor and maketh rich."

> "He bringeth low, He also lifteth up;
> He raiseth up the poor out of the dust:
> He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill,
> To make them sit with princes
> And inherit the throne of glory."[1]

This song might have been sung at Jarha's wedding as well as at Joseph's.

Both these marriages throw a sidelight upon the character of Eastern slavery. They show how sharply and deeply it was divided from the hopeless degradation of negro slavery in America. Israelites did not recognise distinctions of race and colour between themselves and their bondsmen so as to treat them as worse than pariahs and regard them with physical loathing. An American considers himself disgraced by a slight taint of negro blood in his ancestry, but a noble Jewish family was proud to trace its descent from an Egyptian slave.

The other story is somewhat different, and rests upon an obscure and corrupt passage in iv. 18. The confusion makes it impossible to arrive at any date,

[1] 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8.

even by rough approximation. The genealogical relations of the actors are by no means certain, but some interesting points are tolerably clear. Some time after the conquest of Canaan, a descendant of Caleb married two wives, one a Jewess, the other an Egyptian. The Egyptian was Bithiah, a daughter of Pharaoh, *i.e.*, of the contemporary king of Egypt. It appears probable that the inhabitants of Eshtemoa traced their descent to this Egyptian princess, while those of Gedor, Soco, and Zanoah claimed Mered as their ancestor by his Jewish wife.[1] Here again we have the bare outline of a romance, which the imagination is at liberty to fill in. It has been suggested that Bithiah may have been the victim of some Jewish raid into Egypt, but surely a king of Egypt would have either ransomed his daughter or recovered her by force of arms. The story rather suggests that the chiefs of the clans of Judah were semi-independent and possessed of considerable wealth and power, so that the royal family of Egypt could intermarry with them, as with reigning sovereigns. But if so, the pride of Egypt must have been greatly broken since the time when the Pharaohs haughtily refused to give their daughters in marriage to the kings of Babylon.

Both Egyptian alliances occur among the Kenizzites, the descendants of the brothers Caleb and Jerahmeel. In one case a Jewess marries an Egyptian slave; in the other a Jew marries an Egyptian princess. Doubtless these marriages did not stand alone, and there were

[1] Vv. 17, 18, as they stand, do not make sense. The second sentence of ver. 18 should be read before "and she bare Miriam" in ver. 17. Mered and Bithiah formed a tempting subject for the rabbis, and gave occasion for some of their usual grotesque fancies. Mered has been identified by them both with Caleb and Moses

others with foreigners of varying social rank. The stories show that even after the Captivity the tradition survived that the clans in the south of Judah had been closely connected with Egypt, and that Solomon was not the only member of the tribe who had taken an Egyptian wife. Now intermarriage with foreigners is partly forbidden by the Pentateuch; and the prohibition was extended and sternly enforced by Ezra and Nehemiah.[1] In the time of the chronicler there was a growing feeling against such marriages. Hence the traditions we are discussing cannot have originated after the Return, but must be at any rate earlier than the publication of Deuteronomy under Josiah.

Such marriages with Egyptians must have had some influence on the religion of the south of Judah, but probably the foreigners usually followed the example of Ruth, and adopted the faith of the families into which they came. When they said, "Thy people shall be my people," they did not fail to add, "and thy God shall be my God." When the Egyptian princess married the head of a Jewish clan, she became one of Jehovah's people; and her adoption into the family of the God of Israel was symbolised by a new name: "Bithiah," "daughter of Jehovah." Whether later Judaism owed anything to Egyptian influences can only be matter of conjecture; at any rate, they did not pervert the southern clans from their old faith. The Calebites and Jerahmeelites were the backbone of Judah both before and after the Captivity.

The remaining traditions relate to the warfare of the Israelites with their neighbours. The first is a colourless reminiscence, that might have been recorded of

[1] Deut. vii. 3; Josh. xxiii. 12; Ezra ix. 1, x.; Neh. xiii. 23.

the effectual prayer of any pious Israelite. The genealogies of chap. iv. are interrupted by a paragraph entirely unconnected with the context. The subject of this fragment is a certain Jabez never mentioned elsewhere, and, so far as any record goes, as entirely "without father, without mother, without genealogy," as Melchizedek himself. As chap. iv. deals with the families of Judah, and in ii. 55 there is a town Jabez also belonging to Judah, we may suppose that the chronicler had reasons for assigning Jabez to that tribe; but he has neither given these reasons, nor indicated how Jabez was connected therewith. The paragraph runs as follows[1]: "And Jabez was honoured above his brethren, and his mother called his name Jabez" (*Ya'bēç*), "saying, In pain" (*'ōçeb*) "I bore him. And Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying,—

> 'If Thou wilt indeed bless me
> By enlarging my possessions,
> And Thy hand be with me
> To provide pasture,[2] that I be not in distress' (*'ōçeb*).

And God brought about what he asked." The chronicler has evidently inserted here a broken and disconnected fragment from one of his sources; and we are puzzled to understand why he gives so much, and no more. Surely not merely to introduce the etymologies of Jabez; or if Jabez were so important that it was worth while to interrupt the genealogies to furnish two derivations of his name, why are we not told more about him? Who was he, when and where did he live, and at whose expense were his possessions

[1] iv. 9, 10.

[2] The reading on which this translation is based is obtained by an alteration of the vowels of the Masoretic text; cf. Bertheau, i.l.

enlarged and pasture provided for him? Everything that could give colour and interest to the narrative is withheld, and we are merely told that he prayed for earthly blessing and obtained it. The spiritual lesson is obvious, but it is very frequently enforced and illustrated in the Old Testament. Why should this episode about an utterly unknown man be thrust by main force into an unsuitable context, if it is only one example of a most familiar truth? It has been pointed out that Jacob vowed a similar vow and built an altar to El, the God of Israel[1]; but this is one of many coincidences. The paragraph certainly tells us something about the chronicler's views on prayer, but nothing that is not more forcibly stated and exemplified in many other passages; it is mainly interesting to us because of the light it throws on his methods of composition. Elsewhere he embodies portions of well-known works and apparently assumes that his readers are sufficiently versed in them to be able to understand the point of his extracts. Probably Jabez was so familiar to the chronicler's immediate circle that he can take for granted that a few lines will suffice to recall all the circumstances to a reader.

We have next a series of much more definite statements about Israelite prowess and success in wars against Moab and other enemies.

In iv. 21, 22, we read, "The sons of Shelah the son of Judah: Er the father of Lecah, and Laadah the father of Mareshah, and the families of the house of them that wrought fine linen, of the house of Ashbea; and Jokim, and the men of Cozeba, and Joash, and Saraph, who had dominion in Moab and returned to

[1] Gen. xxviii. 20; xxxiii. 20.

Bethlehem."[1] Here again the information is too vague to enable us to fix any date, nor is it quite certain who had dominion in Moab. The verb "had dominion" is plural in Hebrew, and may refer to all or any of the sons of Shelah. But, in spite of uncertainties, it is interesting to find chiefs or clans of Judah ruling in Moab. Possibly this immigration took place when David conquered and partly depopulated the country. The men of Judah may have returned to Bethlehem when Moab passed to the northern kingdom at the disruption, or when Moab regained its independence.

The incident in iv. 34–43 differs from the preceding in having a definite date assigned to it. In the time of Hezekiah some Simeonite clans had largely increased in number and found themselves straitened for room for their flocks. They accordingly went in search of new pasturage. One company went to Gedor, another to Mount Seir.

The situation of Gedor is not clearly known. It cannot be the Gedor of Josh. xv. 58, which lay in the heart of Judah. The LXX. has Gerar, a town to the south of Gaza, and this may be the right reading; but whether we read Gedor or Gerar, the scene of the invasion will be in the country south of Judah. Here the children of Simeon found what they wanted, "fat pasture, and good," and abundant, for "the land was wide." There was the additional advantage that the inhabitants were harmless and inoffensive and fell an easy prey to their invaders: "The land was quiet and peaceable, for they that dwelt there aforetime were of Ham." As Ham in the genealogies is the father of Cainan, these peaceable folk would be Cainanites; and

[1] This translation is obtained by slightly altering the Masoretic text.

among them were a people called Meunim, probably not connected with any of the Maons mentioned in the Old Testament, but with some other town or district of the same name. So "these written by name came in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and smote their tents, and the Meunim that were found there, and devoted them to destruction as accursed, so that none are left unto this day. And the Simeonites dwelt in their stead."[1]

Then follows in the simplest and most unconscious way the only justification that is offered for the behaviour of the invaders: "because there was pasture there for their flocks." The narrative takes for granted—

> "The good old rule, the simple plan,
> That they should take who have the power,
> And they should keep who can."

The expedition to Mount Seir appears to have been a sequel to the attack on Gedor. Five hundred of the victors emigrated into Edom, and smote the remnant of the Amalekites who had survived the massacre under Saul[2]; "and they also dwelt there unto this day."

In substance, style, and ideas this passage closely resembles the books of Joshua and Judges, where the phrase "unto this day" frequently occurs. Here, of course, the "day" in question is the time of the chronicler's authority. When Chronicles was written the Simeonites in Gedor and Mount Seir had long ago shared the fate of their victims.

The conquest of Gedor reminds us how in the early days of the Israelite occupation of Palestine "Judah

[1] iv. 41; cf. R.V.

[2] 1 Sam. xv.

went with Simeon his brother into the same southern lands," and they smote the Canaanites that inhabited Zephath, and devoted them to destruction as accursed[1]; and how the house of Joseph took Bethel by treachery.[2] But the closest parallel is the Danite conquest of Laish.[3] The Danite spies said that the people of Laish "dwelt in security, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure," harmless and inoffensive, like the Gedorites. Nor were they likely to receive succour from the powerful city of Zidon or from other allies, for "they were far from the Zidonians, and had no dealings with any man." Accordingly, having observed the prosperous but defenceless position of this peaceable people, they returned and reported to their brethren, "Arise, and let us go up against them, for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good; and are ye still? Be not slothful to go and to enter in to possess the land. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and the land," like that of Gedor, "is large, for God hath given it into your hand, a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth."

The moral of these incidents is obvious. When a prosperous people is peaceable and defenceless, it is a clear sign that God has delivered them into the hand of any warlike and enterprising nation that knows how to use its opportunities. The chronicler, however, is not responsible for this morality, but he does not feel compelled to make any protest against the ethical views of his source. There is a refreshing frankness about these ancient narratives. The wolf devours the lamb without inventing any flimsy pretext about troubled waters.

[1] Judges i. 17. [2] Judges i. 22–26.
[3] Judges xviii

But in criticising these Hebrew clans who lived in the dawn of history and religion we condemn ourselves. If we make adequate allowance for the influence of Christ, and the New Testament, and centuries of Christian teaching, Simeon and Dan do not compare unfavourably with modern nations. As we review the wars of Christendom, we shall often be puzzled to find any ground for the outbreak of hostilities other than the defencelessness of the weaker combatant. The Spanish conquest of America and the English conquest of India afford examples of the treatment of weaker races which fairly rank with those of the Old Testament. Even to-day the independence of the smaller European states is mainly guaranteed by the jealousies of the Great Powers. Still there has been progress in international morality; we have got at last to the stage of Æsop's fable. Public opinion condemns wanton aggression against a weak state; and the stronger power employs the resources of civilised diplomacy in showing that not only the absent, but also the helpless, are always wrong. There has also been a substantial advance in humanity towards conquered peoples. Christian warfare even since the Middle Ages has been stained with the horrors of the Thirty Years' War and many other barbarities; the treatment of the American Indians by settlers has often been cruel and unjust; but no civilised nation would now systematically massacre men, women, and children in cold blood. We are thankful for any progress towards better things, but we cannot feel that men have yet realised that Christ has a message for nations as well as for individuals. As His disciples we can only pray more earnestly that the kingdoms of the earth may in deed and truth become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

The next incident is more honourable to the Israelites. "The sons of Reuben, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh" did not merely surprise and slaughter quiet and peaceable people: they conquered formidable enemies in fair fight.[1] There are two separate accounts of a war with the Hagrites, one appended to the genealogy of Reuben and one to that of Gad. The former is very brief and general, comprising nothing but a bare statement that there was a successful war and a consequent appropriation of territory. Probably the two paragraphs are different forms of the same narrative, derived by the chronicler from independent sources. We may therefore confine our attention to the more detailed account.

Here, as elsewhere, these Transjordanic tribes are spoken of as "valiant[2] men," "men able to bear buckler and sword and to shoot with the bow, and skilful in war." Their numbers were considerable. While five hundred Simeonites were enough to destroy the Amalekites on Mount Seir, these eastern tribes mustered "forty and four thousand seven hundred and threescore that were able to go forth to war." Their enemies were not "quiet and peaceable people," but the wild Bedouin of the desert, "the Hagrites, with Jetur and Naphish and Nodab." Nodab is mentioned only here; Jetur and Naphish occur together in the lists of the sons of Ishmael.[3] Ituræa probably derived its name from the tribe of Jetur. The Hagrites or Hagarenes were Arabs closely connected with the Ishmaelites, and they seem to have taken their name from Hagar. In Psalm

[1] Vv. 7–10, 18–22.
[2] Deut. xxxiii. 20; 1 Chron. xii. 8, 21.
[3] Gen. xxv. 15.

lxxxiii. 6–8 we find a similar confederacy on a larger scale :—

> "The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites,
> Moab and the Hagarenes
> Gebal and Ammon and Amalek,
> Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre,
> Assyria also is joined with them;
> They have holpen the children of Lot."

There could be no question of unprovoked aggression against these children of Ishmael, that "wild ass of a man, whose hand was against every man, and every man's hand against him."[1] The narrative implies that the Israelites were the aggressors, but to attack the robber tribes of the desert would be as much an act of self-defence as to destroy a hornet's nest. We may be quite sure that when Reuben and Gad marched eastward they had heavy losses to retrieve and bitter wrongs to avenge. We might find a parallel in the campaigns by which robber tribes are punished for their raids within our Indian frontier, only we must remember that Reuben and Gad were not very much more law-abiding or unselfish than their Arab neighbours. They were not engaged in maintaining a *pax Britannica* for the benefit of subject nations; they were carrying on a struggle for existence with persistent and relentless foes. Another partial parallel would be the border feuds on the Northumbrian marches, when—

> ". . . over border, dale, and fell
> Full wide and far was terror spread;
> For pathless marsh and mountain cell
> The peasant left his lowly shed:
> The frightened flocks and herds were pent
> Beneath the peel's rude battlement,

[1] Gen. xvi. 12.

> And maids and matrons dropped the tear
> While ready warriors seized the spear;
> . . . . . the watchman's eye
> Dun wreaths of distant smoke can spy."[1]

But the Israelite expedition was on a larger scale than any "warden raid," and Eastern passions are fiercer and shriller than those sung by the Last Minstrel: the maids and matrons of the desert would shriek and wail instead of "dropping a tear."

In this great raid of ancient times "the war was of God," not, as at Laish, because God found for them helpless and easy victims, but because He helped them in a desperate struggle. When the fierce Israelite and Arab borderers joined battle, the issue was at first doubtful; and then "they cried to God, and He was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him," "and they were helped against" their enemies; "and the Hagrites were delivered into their hand, and all that were with them, and there fell many slain, because the war was of God"; "and they took away their cattle: of their camels fifty thousand, and of sheep two hundred and fifty thousand, and of asses two thousand, and of slaves a hundred thousand." "And they dwelt in their stead until the captivity."

This "captivity" is the subject of another short note. The chronicler apparently was anxious to distribute his historical narratives equally among the tribes. The genealogies of Reuben and Gad each conclude with a notice of a war, and a similar account follows that of Eastern Manasseh:—"And they trespassed against the God of their fathers, and went a-whoring after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God destroyed before them. And the God of

[1] *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, iv. 3.

Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, and he carried them away, even the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them unto Halah, and Habor, and Hara, and to the river of Gozan, unto this day."[1] And this war also was "of God." Doubtless the descendants of the surviving Hagrites and Ishmaelites were among the allies of the Assyrian king, and saw in the ruin of Eastern Israel a retribution for the sufferings of their own people; but the later Jews and probably the exiles in "Halah, Habor, and Hara," and by "the river of Gozan," far away in North-eastern Mesopotamia, found the cause of their sufferings in too great an intimacy with their heathen neighbours: they had gone a-whoring after their gods.

The last two incidents which we shall deal with in this chapter serve to illustrate afresh the rough-and-ready methods by which the chronicler has knotted together threads of heterogeneous tradition into one tangled skein. We shall see further how ready ancient writers were to represent a tribe by the ancestor from whom it traced its descent. We read in vii. 20, 21, "The sons of Ephraim: Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tahath his son, and Eleadah his son, and Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in the land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle."

Ezer and Elead are apparently brothers of the second Shuthelah; at any rate, as six generations are mentioned between them and Ephraim, they would seem to have lived long after the Patriarch. Moreover, they

[1] Vv. 25, 26. Note the curious spelling *Tilgath-pilneser* for the more usual *Tiglath-pileser*.

came down to Gath, so that they must have lived in some hill-country not far off, presumably the hill-country of Ephraim. But in the next two verses (22 and 23) we read, "And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him. And he went in to his wife, and she conceived, and bare a son; and he called his name Beriah, because it went evil with his house."

Taking these words literally, Ezer and Elead were the actual sons of Ephraim; and as Ephraim and his family were born in Egypt and lived there all their days, these patriarchal cattle-lifters did not come down from any neighbouring highlands, but must have come up from Egypt, all the way from the land of Goshen, across the desert and past several Philistine and Canaanite towns. This literal sense is simply impossible. The author from whom the chronicler borrowed this narrative is clearly using a natural and beautiful figure to describe the distress in the tribe of Ephraim when two of its clans were cut off, and the fact that a new clan named Beriah was formed to take their place. Possibly we are not without information as to how this new clan arose. In viii. 13 we read of two Benjamites, "*Beriah* and Shema, who were heads of fathers' houses of the inhabitants of Aijalon, who put to flight the inhabitants of Gath." Beriah and Shema probably, coming to the aid of Ephraim, avenged the defeat of Ezer and Elead; and in return received the possessions of the clans, who had been cut off, and Beriah was thus reckoned among the children of Ephraim.[1]

The language of ver. 22 is very similar to that of Gen. xxxvii. 34, 35: "And Jacob mourned for his son

[1] Cf. Bertheau, i.l.

many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him"; and the personification of the tribe under the name of its ancestor may be paralleled from Judges xxi. 6: "And the children of Israel repented them for Benjamin their brother."

Let us now reconstruct the story and consider its significance. Two Ephraimite clans, Ezer and Elead, set out to drive the cattle "of the men of Gath, who were born in the land," *i.e.*, of the aboriginal Avvites, who had been dispossessed by the Philistines, but still retained some of the pasture-lands. Falling into an ambush or taken by surprise when encumbered with their plunder, the Ephraimites were cut off, and nearly all the fighting men of the clans perished. The Avvites, reinforced by the Philistines of Gath, pressed their advantage, and invaded the territory of Ephraim, whose border districts, stripped of their defenders, lay at the mercy of the conquerors. From this danger they were rescued by the Benjamite clans Shema and Beriah, then occupying Aijalon[1]; and the men of Gath in their turn were defeated and driven back. The grateful Ephraimites invited their allies to occupy the vacant territory and in all probability to marry the widows and daughters of their slaughtered kinsmen. From that time onwards Beriah was reckoned as one of the clans of Ephraim.

The account of this memorable cattle foray is a necessary note to the genealogies to explain the origin of an important clan and its double connection

[1] In Josh. xix. 42, xxi. 24, Aijalon is given to Dan; in Judges i. 34 it is given to Dan, but we are told that Amorites retained possession of it, but became tributary to the house of Joseph; in 2 Chron. xi. 10 it is given to "Judah and Benjamin." As a frontier town, it frequently changed hands.

with Ephraim and Benjamin. Both the chronicler and his authority recorded it because of its genealogical significance, not because they were anxious to perpetuate the memory of the unfortunate raid. In the ancient days to which the episode belonged, a frontier cattle foray seemed as natural and meritorious an enterprise as it did to William of Deloraine. The chronicler does not think it necessary to signify any disapproval—it is by no means certain that he did disapprove—of such spoiling of the uncircumcised; but the fact that he gives the record without comment does not show that he condoned cattle-stealing. Men to-day relate with pride the lawless deeds of noble ancestors, but they would be dismayed if their own sons proposed to adopt the moral code of mediæval barons or Elizabethan buccaneers.

In reviewing the scanty religious ideas involved in this little group of family traditions, we have to remember that they belong to a period of Israelite history much older than that of the chronicler; in estimating their value, we have to make large allowance for the conventional ethics of the times. Religion not only serves to raise the standard of morality, but also to keep the average man up to the conventional standard; it helps and encourages him to do what he believes to be right as well as gives him a better understanding of what right means. Primitive religion is not to be disparaged because it did not at once convert the rough Israelite clansmen into Havelocks and Gordons. In those early days, courage, patriotism, and loyalty to one's tribesmen were the most necessary and approved virtues. They were fostered and stimulated by the current belief in a God of battles, who gave victory to His faithful people. Moreover, the

idea of Deity implied in these traditions, though inadequate, is by no means unworthy. God is benevolent; He enriches and succours His people; He answers prayer, giving to Jabez the land and pasture for which he asked. He is a righteous God; He responds to and justifies His people's faith: "He was entreated of the Reubenites and Gadites because they put their trust in Him." On the other hand, He is a jealous God; He punishes Israel when "they trespass against the God of their fathers and go a-whoring after the gods of the peoples of the land." But the feeling here attributed to Jehovah is not merely one of personal jealousy. Loyalty to Him meant a great deal more than a preference for a god called Jehovah over a god called Chemosh. It involved a special recognition of morality and purity, and gave a religious sanction to patriotism and the sentiment of national unity. Worship of Moabite or Syrian gods weakened a man's enthusiasm for Israel and his sense of fellowship with his countrymen, just as allegiance to an Italian prince and prelate has seemed to Protestants to deprive the Romanist of his full inheritance in English life and feeling. He who went astray after other gods did not merely indulge his individual taste in doctrine and ritual: he was a traitor to the social order, to the prosperity and national union, of Israel. Such disloyalty broke up the nation, and sent Israel and Judah into captivity piecemeal.

CHAPTER V

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN THE TIME OF THE CHRONICLER

WE have already referred to the light thrown by Chronicles on this subject. Besides the direct information given in Ezra and Nehemiah, and sometimes in Chronicles itself, the chronicler by describing the past in terms of the present often unconsciously helps us to reconstruct the picture of his own day. We shall have to make occasional reference to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, but the age of the chronicler is later than the events which they describe, and we shall be traversing different ground from that covered by the volume of the "Expositor's Bible" which deals with them.

Chronicles is full of evidence that the civil and ecclesiastical system of the Pentateuch had become fully established long before the chronicler wrote. Its gradual origin had been forgotten, and it was assumed that the Law in its final and complete form had been known and observed from the time of David onwards. At every stage of the history Levites are introduced, occupying the subordinate position and discharging the menial duties assigned to them by the latest documents of the Pentateuch. In other matters small and

great, especially those concerning the Temple and its sanctity, the chronicler shows himself so familiar with the Law that he could not imagine Israel without it. Picture the life of Judah as we find it in 2 Kings and the prophecies of the eighth century, put this picture side by side with another of the Judaism of the New Testament, and remember that Chronicles is about a century nearer to the latter than to the former. It is not difficult to trace the effect of this absorption in the system of the Pentateuch. The community in and about Jerusalem had become a Church, and was in possession of a Bible. But the hardening, despiritualising processes which created later Judaism were already at work. A building, a system of ritual, and a set of officials were coming to be regarded as the essential elements of the Church. The Bible was important partly because it dealt with these essential elements, partly because it provided a series of regulations about washings and meats, and thus enabled the layman to exalt his everyday life into a round of ceremonial observances. The habit of using the Pentateuch chiefly as a handbook of external and technical ritual seriously influenced the current interpretation of the Bible. It naturally led to a hard literalism and a disingenuous exegesis. This interest in externals is patent enough in the chronicler, and the tendencies of Biblical exegesis are illustrated by his use of Samuel and Kings. On the other hand, we must allow for great development of this process in the interval between Chronicles and the New Testament. The evils of later Judaism were yet far from mature, and religious life and thought in Palestine were still much more elastic than they became later on.

We have also to remember that at this period the

zealous observers of the Law can only have formed a portion of the community, corresponding roughly to the regular attendants at public worship in a Christian country. Beyond and beneath the pious legalists were "the people of the land," those who were too careless or too busy to attend to ceremonial; but for both classes the popular and prominent ideal of religion was made up of a magnificent building, a dignified and wealthy clergy, and an elaborate ritual, alike for great public functions and for the minutiæ of daily life.

Besides all these the Jewish community had its sacred writings. As one of the ministers of the Temple, and, moreover, both a student of the national literature and himself an author, the chronicler represents the best literary knowledge of contemporary Palestinian Judaism; and his somewhat mechanical methods of composition make it easy for us to discern his indebtedness to older writers. We turn his pages with interest to learn what books were known and read by the most cultured Jews of his time. First and foremost, and overshadowing all the rest, there appears the Pentateuch. Then there is the whole array of earlier Historical Books: Joshua, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings. The plan of Chronicles excludes a direct use of Judges, but it must have been well known to our author. His appreciation of the Psalms is shown by his inserting in his history of David a cento of passages from Psalms xcvi., cv., and cvi.; on the other hand, Psalm xviii. and other lyrics given in the books of Samuel are omitted by the chronicler. The later Exilic Psalms were more to his taste than ancient hymns, and he unconsciously carries back into the history of the monarchy the poetry as well as the ritual of later times. Both omissi ns and insertions indicate that in

this period the Jews possessed and prized a large collection of psalms.

There are also traces of the Prophets. Hanani the seer in his address to Asa[1] quotes Zech. iv. 10: "The eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth." Jehoshaphat's exhortation to his people, "Believe in the Lord your God; so shall ye be established,"[2] is based on Isa. vii. 9: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." Hezekiah's words to the Levites, "Our fathers . . . have turned away their faces from the habitation of the Lord, and turned their backs,"[3] are a significant variation of Jer. ii. 27: "They have turned their back unto Me, and not their face." The Temple is substituted for Jehovah.

There are of course references to Isaiah and Jeremiah and traces of other prophets; but when account is taken of them all, it is seen that the chronicler makes scanty use, on the whole, of the Prophetical Books. It is true that the idea of illustrating and supplementing information derived from annals by means of contemporary literature not in narrative form had not yet dawned upon historians; but if the chronicler had taken a tithe of the interest in the Prophets that he took in the Pentateuch and the Psalms, his work would show many more distinct marks of their influence.

An apocalypse like Daniel and works like Job, Proverbs, and the other books of Wisdom lay so far outside the plan and subject of Chronicles that we can scarcely consider the absence of any clear trace of them a proof that the chronicler did not either know them or care for them.

Our brief review suggests that the literary concern

[1] 2 Chron. xvi. 9. [2] 2 Chron. xx. 20.
[3] 2 Chron. xxix. 6.

of the chronicler and his circle was chiefly in the books most closely connected with the Temple; viz., the Historical Books, which contained its history, the Pentateuch, which prescribed its ritual, and the Psalms, which served as its liturgy. The Prophets occupy a secondary place, and Chronicles furnishes no clear evidence as to other Old Testament books.

We also find in Chronicles that the Hebrew language had degenerated from its ancient classical purity, and that Jewish writers had already come very much under the influence of Aramaic.

We may next consider the evidence supplied by the chronicler as to the elements and distribution of the Jewish community in his time. In Ezra and Nehemiah we find the returning exiles divided into the men of Judah, the men of Benjamin, and the priests, Levites, etc. In Ezra ii. we are told that in all there returned 42,360, with 7,337 slaves and 200 "singing men and singing women." The priests numbered 4,289; there were 74 Levites, 128 singers of the children of Asaph, 139 porters, and 392 Nethinim and children of Solomon's servants. The singers, porters, Nethinim, and children of Solomon's servants are not reckoned among the Levites, and there is only one guild of singers: "the children of Asaph." The Nethinim are still distinguished from the Levites in the list of those who returned with Ezra, and in various lists which occur in Nehemiah. We see from the Levitical genealogies and the Levites in 1 Chron. vi., ix., etc., that in the time of the chronicler these arrangements had been altered. There were now three guilds of singers, tracing their descent to Heman, Asaph, and Ethan[1] or Jeduthun, and reckoned by descent among the Levites.

[1] 1 Chron. vi. 31–48, xv. 16–20; cf. psalm titles.

The guild of Heman seems to have been also known as "the sons of Korah."[1] The porters and probably eventually the Nethinim were also reckoned among the Levites.[2]

We see therefore that in the interval between Nehemiah and the chronicler the inferior ranks of the Temple ministry had been reorganised, the musical staff had been enlarged and doubtless otherwise improved, and the singers, porters, Nethinim, and other Temple servants had been promoted to the position of Levites. Under the monarchy many of the Temple servants had been slaves of foreign birth; but now a sacred character was given to the humblest menial who shared in the work of the house of God. In after-times Herod the Great had a number of priests trained as masons, in order that no profane hand might take part in the building of his temple.

Some details have been preserved of the organisation of the Levites. We read how the porters were distributed among the different gates, and of Levites who were over the chambers and the treasuries, and of other Levites how—

"They lodged round about the house of God, because the charge was upon them, and to them pertained the opening thereof morning by morning.

"And certain of them had charge of the vessels of service; for by tale were they brought in, and by tale were they taken out.

"Some of them also were appointed over the furniture, and over all the vessels of the sanctuary, and over the fine flour, and the wine, and the oil, and the frankincense, and the spices.

[1] 1 Chron. vi. 33, 37; cf. Psalm lxxxviii. (title).
[2] 1 Chron. xvi. 38, 42.

"And some of the sons of the priests prepared the confection of the spices.

"And Mattithiah, one of the Levites who was the first-born of Shallum the Korahite, had the set office over the things that were baked in pans.

"And some of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread to prepare it every sabbath."[1]

This account is found in a chapter partly identical with Neh. xi., and apparently refers to the period of Nehemiah; but the picture in the latter part of the chapter was probably drawn by the chronicler from his own knowledge of Temple routine. So, too, in his graphic accounts of the sacrifices by Hezekiah and Josiah,[2] we seem to have an eyewitness describing familiar scenes. Doubtless the chronicler himself had often been one of the Temple choir "when the burnt-offering began, and the song of Jehovah began also, together with the instruments of David, king of Israel; and all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; and all this continued till the burnt-offering was finished."[3] Still the scale of these sacrifices, the hundreds of oxen and thousands of sheep, may have been fixed to accord with the splendour of the ancient kings. Such profusion of victims probably represented rather the dreams than the realities of the chronicler's Temple.

Our author's strong feeling for his own Levitical order shows itself in his narrative of Hezekiah's great sacrifices. The victims were so numerous that there

[1] 1 Chron. ix. 26–32; cf. 1 Chron. xxiii. 24–32.
[2] 2 Chron. xxix.–xxxi.; xxxiv.; xxxv.
[3] 2 Chron. xxix. 27, 28.

were not priests enough to flay them; to meet the emergency the Levites were allowed on this one occasion to discharge a priestly function and to take an unusually conspicuous part in the national festival. In zeal they were even superior to the priests: "The Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests." Possibly here the chronicler is describing an incident which he could have paralleled from his own experience. The priests of his time may often have yielded to a natural temptation to shirk the laborious and disagreeable parts of their duty; they would catch at any plausible pretext to transfer their burdens to the Levites, which the latter would be eager to accept for the sake of a temporary accession of dignity. Learned Jews were always experts in the art of evading the most rigid and minute regulations of the Law. For instance, the period of service appointed for the Levites in the Pentateuch was from the age of thirty to that of fifty.[1] But we gather from Ezra and Nehemiah that comparatively few Levites could be induced to throw in their lot with the returning exiles; there were not enough to perform the necessary duties. To make up for paucity of numbers, this period of service was increased; and they were required to serve from twenty years old and upward.[2] As the former arrangement had formed part of the law attributed to Moses, in course of time the later innovation was supposed to have originated with David.

There were, too, other reasons for increasing the efficiency of the Levitical order by lengthening their

[1] Num. iv. 3, 23, 35.

[2] 1 Chron. xxiii. 24, 27. Probably "twenty" should be read for "thirty" in ver. 3.

term of service and adding to their numbers. The establishment of the Pentateuch as the sacred code of Judaism imposed new duties on priests and Levites alike. The people needed teachers and interpreters of the numerous minute and complicated rules by which they were to govern their daily life. Judges were needed to apply the laws in civil and criminal cases. The Temple ministers were the natural authorities on the Torah; they had a chief interest in expounding and enforcing it. But in these matters also the priests seem to have left the new duties to the Levites. Apparently the first "scribes," or professional students of the Law, were mainly Levites. There were priests among them, notably the great father of the order, "Ezra the priest the scribe," but the priestly families took little share in this new work. The origin of the educational and judicial functions of the Levites had also come to be ascribed to the great kings of Judah. A Levitical scribe is mentioned in the time of David.[1] In the account of Josiah's reign we are expressly told that "of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters"; and they are described as "the Levites that taught all Israel."[2] In the same context we have the traditional authority and justification for this new departure. One of the chief duties imposed upon the Levites by the Law was the care and carriage of the Tabernacle and its furniture during the wanderings in the wilderness. Josiah, however, bids the Levites "put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, did build; there shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders; now serve the Lord your God and His people Israel."[3] In other words,

[1] 1 Chron. xxiv. 6. [2] 2 Chron. xxxiv. 13; xxxv. 3.
[3] 2 Chron. xxxv. 3; cf. 1 Chron. xxiii. 26.

"You are relieved of a large part of your old duties, and therefore have time to undertake new ones." The immediate application of this principle seems to be that a section of the Levites should do all the menial work of the sacrifices, and so leave the priests, and singers, and porters free for their own special service; but the same argument would be found convenient and conclusive whenever the priests desired to impose any new functions on the Levites.

Still the task of expounding and enforcing the Law brought with it compensations in the shape of dignity, influence, and emolument; and the Levites would soon be reconciled to their work as scribes, and would discover with regret that they could not retain the exposition of the Law in their own hands. Traditions were cherished in certain Levitical families that their ancestors had been "officers and judges" under David[1]; and it was believed that Jehoshaphat had organised a commission largely composed of Levites to expound and administer the Law in country districts.[2] This commission consisted of five princes, nine Levites, and two priests; "and they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people." As the subject of their teaching was the Pentateuch, their mission must have been rather judicial than religious. With regard to a later passage, it has been suggested that "probably it is the organisation of justice as existing in his own day that he" (the chronicler) "here carries back to Jehoshaphat, so that here most likely we have the oldest testimony to the synedrium of Jerusalem as a

[1] 1 Chron. xxvi. 29. [2] 2 Chron. xvii. 7, 9.

court of highest instance over the provincial synedria, as also to its composition and presidency."[1] We can scarcely doubt that the form the chronicler has given to the tradition is derived from the institutions of his own age, and that his friends the Levites were prominent among the doctors of the Law, and not only taught and judged in Jerusalem, but also visited the country districts.

It will appear from this brief survey that the Levites were very completely organised. There were not only the great classes, the scribes, officers, porters, singers, and the Levites proper, so to speak, who assisted the priests, but special families had been made responsible for details of service: "Mattithiah had the set office over the things that were baked in pans; and some of their brethren, of the sons of the Kohathites, were over the shewbread, to prepare it every sabbath."[2]

The priests were organised quite differently. The small number of Levites necessitated careful arrangements for using them to the best advantage; of priests there were enough and to spare. The four thousand two hundred and eighty-nine priests who returned with Zerubbabel were an extravagant and impossible allowance for a single temple, and we are told that the numbers increased largely as time went on. The problem was to devise some means by which all the priests should have some share in the honours and emoluments of the Temple, and its solution was found in the "courses." The priests who returned with Zerubbabel are registered in four families: "the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua; . . . the children of Immer; . . . the children of Pashhur; . . . the children

[1] Wellhausen, *History of Israel*, p. 191; cf. 2 Chron. xix. 4–11.

[2] 1 Chron. ix. 31, 32.

of Harim."[1] But the organisation of the chronicler's time is, as usual, to be found among the arrangements ascribed to David, who is said to have divided the priests into their twenty-four courses.[2] Amongst the heads of the courses we find Jedaiah, Jeshua, Harim, and Immer, but not Pashhur. Post-Biblical authorities mention twenty-four courses in connection with the second Temple. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, belonged to the course of Abijah[3]; and Josephus mentions a course "Eniakim."[4] Abijah was the head of one of David's courses; and Eniakim is almost certainly a corruption of Eliakim, of which name Jakim in Chronicles is a contraction.

These twenty-four courses discharged the priestly duties each in its turn. One was busy at the Temple while the other twenty-three were at home, some perhaps living on the profits of their office, others at work on their farms. The high-priest, of course, was always at the Temple; and the continuity of the ritual would necessitate the appointment of other priests as a permanent staff. The high-priest and the staff, being always on the spot, would have great opportunities for improving their own position at the expense of the other members of the courses, who were only there occasionally for a short time. Accordingly we are told later on that a few families had appropriated nearly all the priestly emoluments.

Courses of the Levites are sometimes mentioned in connection with those of the priests, as if the Levites had an exactly similar organisation.[5] Indeed, twenty-four courses of the singers are expressly named.[6] But

[1] Ezra ii. 36–39.
[2] 1 Chron. xxiv. 1–19.
[3] Luke i. 5.
[4] *Bell. Jud.*, IV. iii. 8.
[5] 1 Chron. xxiv. 20–31; 2 Chron. xxxi. 2.
[6] 1 Chron. xxv.

on examination we find that "course" for the Levites in all cases where exact information is given [1] does not mean one of a number of divisions which took work in turn, but a division to which a definite piece of work was assigned, *e.g.*, the care of the shewbread or of one of the gates. The idea that in ancient times there were twenty-four alternating courses of Levites was not derived from the arrangements of the chronicler's age, but was an inference from the existence of priestly courses. According to the current interpretation of the older history, there must have been under the monarchy a very great many more Levites than priests, and any reasons that existed for organising twenty-four priestly courses would apply with equal force to the Levites. It is true that the names of twenty-four courses of singers are given, but in this list occurs the remarkable and impossible group of names already discussed :—

"*I-have-magnified, I-have-exalted-help; Sitting-in-distress, I-have-spoken In-abundance Visions*," [2] which are in themselves sufficient proof that these twenty-four courses of singers did not exist in the time of the chronicler.

Thus the chronicler provides material for a fairly complete account of the service and ministers of the Temple; but his interest in other matters was less close and personal, so that he gives us comparatively little information about civil persons and affairs. The restored Jewish community was, of course, made up of descendants of the members of the old kingdom of

[1] 1 Chron. xxvi.; Ezra vi. 18; Neh. xi. 36.

[2] Recently a complaint was received at the General Post-office that some newspapers sent from France had failed to arrive. It was stated that the names of the papers were—*Il me manque*; *Plusieurs*; *Journaux*; *i.e.*, "I am short of" "Several" "Papers."

Judah. The new Jewish state, like the old, is often spoken of as "Judah"; but its claim to fully represent the chosen people of Jehovah is expressed by the frequent use of the name "Israel." Yet within this new Judah the old tribes of Judah and Benjamin are still recognised. It is true that in the register of the first company of returning exiles the tribes are ignored, and we are not told which families belonged to Judah or which to Benjamin; but we are previously told that the chiefs of Judah and Benjamin rose up to return to Jerusalem. Part of this register arranges the companies according to the towns in which their ancestors had lived before the Captivity, and of these some belong to Judah and some to Benjamin. We also learn that the Jewish community included certain of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh.[1] There may also have been families from the other tribes; St. Luke, for instance, describes Anna as of the tribe of Asher.[2] But the mass of genealogical matter relating to Judah and Benjamin far exceeds what is given as to the other tribes,[3] and proves that Judah and Benjamin were co-ordinate members of the restored community, and that no other tribe contributed any appreciable contingent, except a few families from Ephraim and Manasseh. It has been suggested that the chronicler shows special interest in the tribes which had occupied Galilee—Asher, Naphtali, Zebulun, and Issachar—and that this special interest indicates that the settlement of Jews in Galilee had attained considerable dimensions at the time when he wrote. But this special interest is not very manifest; and later on, in the time of the

[1] 1 Chron. ix. 3. [2] Luke ii. 36.
[3] Levi of course excepted.

Maccabees, the Jews in Galilee were so few that Simon took them all away with him, together with their wives and their children and all that they had, and brought them into Judæa.

The genealogies seem to imply that no descendants of the Transjordanic tribes or of Simeon were found in Judah in the age of the chronicler.

Concerning the tribe of Judah, we have already noted that it included two families which traced their descent to Egyptian ancestors, and that the Kenizzite clans of Caleb and Jerahmeel had been entirely incorporated in Judah and formed the most important part of the tribe. A comparison of the parallel genealogies of the house of Caleb gives us important information as to the territory occupied by the Jews. In ii. 42–49 we find the Calebites at Hebron and other towns of the south country, in accordance with the older history; but in ii. 50–55 they occupy Bethlehem and Kirjath-jearim and other towns in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. The two paragraphs are really giving their territory before and after the Exile; during the Captivity Southern Judah had been occupied by the Edomites. It is indeed stated in Neh. xi. 25–30 that the children of Judah dwelt in a number of towns scattered over the whole territory of the ancient tribe; but the list concludes with the significant sentence, "So they *encamped* from Beer-sheba unto the valley of Hinnom." We are thus given to understand that the occupation was not permanent.

We have already noted that much of the space allotted to the genealogies of Judah is devoted to the house of David.[1] The form of this pedigree for the

[1] 1 Chron. iii.

generations after the Captivity indicates that the head of the house of David was no longer the chief of the state. During the monarchy only the kings are given as heads of the family in each generation: "Solomon's son was Rehoboam, Abijah his son, Asa his son," etc., etc.; but after the Captivity the first-born no longer occupied so unique a position. We have all the sons of each successive head of the family.

The genealogies of Judah include one or two references which throw a little light on the social organisation of the times. There were "families of scribes which dwelt at Jabez"[1] as well as the Levitical scribes. In the appendix[2] to the genealogies of chap. iv. we read of a house whose families wrought fine linen, and of other families who were porters to the king and lived on the royal estates. The immediate reference of these statements is clearly to the monarchy, and we are told that "the records are ancient"; but these ancient records were probably obtained by the chronicler from contemporary members of the families, who still pursued their hereditary calling.

As regards the tribe of Benjamin, we have seen that there was a family claiming descent from Saul.

The slight and meagre information given about Judah and Benjamin cannot accurately represent their importance as compared with the priests and Levites, but the general impression conveyed by the chronicler is confirmed by our other authorities. In his time the supreme interests of the Jews were religious. The one great institution was the Temple; the highest order was the priesthood. All Jews were in a measure servants of the Temple; Ephesus indeed was proud to be called

[1] ii. 55. [2] iv. 21–23.

the temple-keeper of the great Diana, but Jerusalem was far more truly the temple-keeper of Jehovah. Devotion to the Temple gave to the Jews a unity which neither of the older Hebrew states had ever possessed. The kernel of this later Jewish territory seems to have been a comparatively small district of which Jerusalem was the centre. The inhabitants of this district carefully preserved the records of their family history, and loved to trace their descent to the ancient clans of Judah and Benjamin; but for practical purposes they were all Jews, without distinction of tribe. Even the ministry of the Temple had become more homogeneous; the non-Levitical descent of some classes of the Temple servants was first ignored and then forgotten, so that assistants at the sacrifices, singers, musicians, scribes, and porters, were all included in the tribe of Levi. The Temple conferred its own sanctity upon all its ministers.

In a previous chapter the Temple and its ministry were compared to a mediæval monastery or the establishment of a modern cathedral. In the same way Jerusalem might be compared to cities, like Ely or Canterbury, which exist mainly for the sake of their cathedrals, only both the sanctuary and city of the Jews came to be on a larger scale. Or, again, if the Temple be represented by the great abbey of St. Edmundsbury, Bury St. Edmunds itself might stand for Jerusalem, and the wide lands of the abbey for the surrounding districts, from which the Jewish priests derived their free-will offerings, and first-fruits, and tithes. Still in both these English instances there was a vigorous and independent secular life far beyond any that existed in Judæa.

A closer parallel to the temple on Zion is to be

found in the immense establishments of the Egyptian temples. It is true that these were numerous in Egypt, and the authority and influence of the priesthood were checked and controlled by the power of the kings; yet on the fall of the twentieth dynasty the high-priest of the great temple of Amen at Thebes succeeded in making himself king, and Egypt, like Judah, had its dynasty of priest-kings.

The following is an account of the possessions of the Theban temple of Amen, supposed to be given by an Egyptian living about B.C. 1350[1]:—

"Since the accession of the eighteenth dynasty, Amen has profited more than any other god, perhaps even more than Pharaoh himself, by the Egyptian victories over the peoples of Syria and Ethiopia. Each success has brought him a considerable share of the spoil collected upon the battle-fields, indemnities levied from the enemy, prisoners carried into slavery. He possesses lands and gardens by the hundred in Thebes and the rest of Egypt, fields and meadows, woods, hunting-grounds, and fisheries; he has colonies in Ethiopia or in the oases of the Libyan desert, and at the extremity of the land of Canaan there are cities under vassalage to him, for Pharaoh allows him to receive the tribute from them. The administration of these vast properties requires as many officials and departments as that of a kingdom. It includes innumerable bailiffs for the agriculture; overseers for the cattle and poultry; treasurers of twenty kinds for the gold, silver, and copper, the vases and valuable stuffs; foremen for the workshops and manufactures; engineers; architects; boatmen; a fleet and an army

[1] Maspero, *Ancient Egypt and Assyria*, p. 60.

which often fight by the side of Pharaoh's fleet and army. It is really a state within the state."

Many of the details of this picture would not be true for the temple of Zion; but the Jews were even more devoted to Jehovah than the Thebans to Amen, and the administration of the Jewish temple was more than "a state within the state": it was the state itself.

CHAPTER VI

TEACHING BY ANACHRONISM

1 CHRON. ix. (cf. xv., xvi., xxiii.–xxvii., etc.).

"And David the king said, . . . Who then offereth willingly? . . . And they gave for the service of the house of God . . . ten thousand darics."—1 CHRON. xxix. 1, 5, 7.

TEACHING by anachronism is a very common and effective form of religious instruction; and Chronicles, as the best Scriptural example of this method, affords a good opportunity for its discussion and illustration.

All history is more or less guilty of anachronism; every historian perforce imports some of the ideas and circumstances of his own time into his narratives and pictures of the past: but we may distinguish three degrees of anachronism. Some writers or speakers make little or no attempt at archæological accuracy; others temper the generally anachronistic character of their compositions by occasional reference to the manners and customs of the period they are describing; and, again, there are a few trained students who succeed in drawing fairly accurate and consistent pictures of ancient life and history.

We will briefly consider the last two classes before returning to the first, in which we are chiefly interested.

Accurate archæology is, of course, part of the ideal of the scientific historian. By long and careful study of literature and monuments and by the exercise of a lively and well-trained imagination, the student obtains a vision of ancient societies. Nineveh and Babylon, Thebes and Memphis, rise from their ashes and stand before him in all their former splendour; he walks their streets and mixes with the crowds in the market-place and the throng of worshippers at the temple, each "in his habit as he lived." Rameses and Sennacherib, Ptolemy and Antiochus, all play their proper parts in this drama of his fancy. He can not only recall their costumes and features: he can even think their thoughts and feel their emotions; he actually lives in the past. In *Marius the Epicurean*, in Ebers's *Uarda*, in Maspero's *Sketches of Assyrian and Egyptian Life*, and in other more serious works we have some of the fruits of this enlightened study of antiquity, and are enabled to see the visions at second hand and in some measure to live at once in the present and the past, to illustrate and interpret the one by the other, to measure progress and decay, and to understand the Divine meaning of all history. Our more recent histories and works on life and manners and even our historical romances, especially those of Walter Scott, have rendered a similar service to students of English history. And yet at its very best such realisation of the past is imperfect; the gaps in our information are unconsciously filled in from our experience, and the ideas of the present always colour our reproduction of ancient thought and feeling. The most accurate history is only a rough approximation to exact truth; but, like many other rough approximations, it is exact enough for many important practical purposes.

But scholarly familiarity with the past has its drawbacks. The scholar may come to live so much amongst ancient memories that he loses touch with his own present. He may gain large stores of information about ancient Israelite life, and yet not know enough of his own generation to be able to make them sharers of his knowledge. Their living needs and circumstances lie outside his practical experience; he cannot explain the past to them because he does not sympathise with their present; he cannot apply its lessons to difficulties and dangers which he does not understand.

Nor is the usefulness of the archæologist merely limited by his own lack of sympathy and experience. He may have both, and yet find that there are few of his contemporaries who can follow him in his excursions into bygone time. These limitations and drawbacks do not seriously diminish the value of archæology, but they have to be taken into account in discussing teaching by anachronism, and they have an important bearing on the practical application of archæological knowledge. We shall return to these points later on.

The second degree of anachronism is very common. We are constantly hearing and reading descriptions of Bible scenes and events in which the centuries before and after Christ are most oddly blended. Here and there will be a costume after an ancient monument, a Biblical description of Jewish customs, a few Scriptural phrases; but these are embedded in paragraphs which simply reproduce the social and religious ideas of the nineteenth century. For instance, in a recent work, amidst much display of archæological knowledge, we have the very modern ideas that Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem at the census, because Joseph and perhaps Mary also had property in Bethlehem, and

that when Joseph died "he left her a small but independent fortune." Many modern books might be named in which Patriarchs and Apostles hold the language and express the sentiments of the most recent schools of devotional Christianity; and yet an air of historical accuracy is assumed by occasional touches of archæology. Similarly in mediæval miracle-plays characters from the Bible appeared in the dress of the period, and uttered a grotesque mixture of Scriptural phrases and vernacular jargon. Much of such work as this may for all practical purposes be classed under the third degree of anachronism. Sometimes, however, the spiritual significance of a passage or an incident turns upon a simple explanation of some ancient custom, so that the archæological detail makes a clear addition to its interest and instructiveness. But in other cases a little archæology is a dangerous thing. Scattered fragments of learned information do not enable the reader in any way to revive the buried past; they only remove the whole subject further from his interest and sympathy. He is not reading about his own day, nor does he understand that the events and personages of the narrative ever had anything in common with himself and his experience. The antique garb, the strange custom, the unusual phrase, disguise that real humanity which the reader shares with these ancient worthies. They are no longer men of like passions with himself, and he finds neither warning nor encouragement in their story. He is like a spectator of a drama played by poor actors with a limited stock of properties. The scenery and dresses show that the play does not belong to his own time, but they fail to suggest that it ever belonged to any period. He has a languid interest in the performance as a

spectacle, but his feelings are not touched, and he is never carried away by the acting.

We have laid so much stress on the drawbacks attaching to a little archæology because they will emphasise what we have to say about the use of pure anachronism. Our last illustration, however, reminds us that these drawbacks detract but little from the influence of earnest men. If the acting be good, we forget the scenery and costumes; the genius of a great preacher more than atones for poor archæology, because, in spite of dress and custom, he makes his hearers feel that the characters of the Bible were instinct with rich and passionate life. We thus arrive at our third degree of pure anachronism.

Most people read their Bible without any reference to archæology. If they dramatise the stories, they do so in terms of their own experience. The characters are dressed like the men and women they know: Nazareth is like their native village, and Jerusalem is like the county town; the conversations are carried on in the English of the Authorised Version. This reading of Scripture is well illustrated by the description in a recent writer of a modern prophet in Tennessee[1]:—

"There was nought in the scene to suggest to a mind familiar with the facts an Oriental landscape—nought akin to the hills of Judæa. It was essentially of the New World, essentially of the Great Smoky Mountains. Yet ignorance has its licence. It never occurred to Teck Jepson that his Bible heroes had lived elsewhere. Their history had to him an intimate personal relation, as of the story of an ancestor, in the homestead ways and closely familiar. He brooded

[1] Craddock, *Despot of Bromsgrove Edge*. Teck Jepson is, of course, an imaginary character, but none the less representative.

upon these narratives, instinct with dramatic interest, enriched with poetic colour, and localised in his robust imagination, till he could trace Hagar's wild wanderings in the fastnesses, could show where Jacob slept and piled his altar of stones, could distinguish the bush, of all others on the 'bald,' that blazed with fire from heaven when the angel of the Lord stood within it. Somehow, even in their grotesque variation, they lost no dignity in their transmission to the modern conditions of his fancy. Did the facts lack significance because it was along the gullied red clay roads of Piomingo Cove that he saw David, the smiling stripling, running and holding high in his hand the bit of cloth cut from Saul's garments while the king had slept in a cave at the base of Chilhowie Mountain? And how was the splendid miracle of translation discredited because Jepson believed that the chariot of the Lord had rested in scarlet and purple clouds upon the towering summit of Thunderhead, that Elijah might thence ascend into heaven?"

Another and more familiar example of "singular alterations in date and circumstances" is the version in *Ivanhoe* of the war between Benjamin and the other tribes:—

"How long since in Palestine a deadly feud arose between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the Israelitish nation; and how they cut to pieces well-nigh all the chivalry of that tribe; and how they swore by our blessed Lady that they would not permit those who remained to marry in their lineage; and how they became grieved for their vow, and sent to consult his Holiness the Pope how they might be absolved from it; and how, by the advice of the Holy Father, the youth of the tribe of Benjamin carried off from a superb tournament all the ladies who were there present, and

thus won them wives without the consent either of their brides or their brides' families."

It is needless to say that the chronicler was not thus hopelessly at sea about the circumstances of ancient Hebrew history; but he wrote in the same simple, straightforward, childlike spirit. Israel had always been the Israel of his own experience, and it never occurred to him that its institutions under the kings had been other than those with which he was familiar. He had no more hesitation in filling up the gaps in the book of Kings from what he saw round about him than a painter would have in putting the white clouds and blue waters of to-day into a picture of skies and seas a thousand years ago. He attributes to the pious kings of Judah the observance of the ritual of his own times. Their prophets use phrases taken from post-Exilic writings. David is regarded as the author of the existing ecclesiastical system in almost all matters that do not date back to Moses, and especially as the organiser of the familiar music of the Temple. David's choristers sing the hymns of the second Temple. Amongst the contributions of his nobles towards the building of the Temple, we read of ten thousand darics, the daric being a coin introduced by the Persian king Darius.

But we must be careful to recognise that the chronicler writes in perfect good faith. These views of the monarchy were common to all educated and thoughtful men of his time; they were embodied in current tradition, and were probably already to be met with in writing. To charge him with inventing them is absurd; they already existed, and did not need to be invented. He cannot have coloured his narrative in the interests of the Temple and the priesthood. When

he lived, these interests were guaranteed by ancient custom and by the authoritative sanction of the Pentateuchal Law. The chronicler does not write with the strong feeling of a man who maintains a doubtful cause; there is no hint of any alternative view which needs to be disproved and rejected in favour of his own. He expatiates on his favourite themes with happy, leisurely serenity, and is evidently confident that his treatment of them will meet with general and cordial approval.

And doubtless the author of Chronicles "served his own generation by the will of God," and served them in the way he intended. He made the history of the monarchy more real and living to them, and enabled them to understand better that the reforming kings of Judah were loyal servants of Jehovah and had been used by Him for the furtherance of true religion. The pictures drawn by Samuel and Kings of David and the best of his successors would not have enabled the Jews of his time to appreciate these facts. They had no idea of any piety that was not expressed in the current observances of the Law, and Samuel and Kings did not ascribe such observances to the earlier kings of Judah. But the chronicler and his authorities were able to discern in the ancient Scriptures the genuine piety of David and Hezekiah and other kings, and drew what seemed to them the obvious conclusion that these pious kings observed the Law. They then proceeded to rewrite the history in order that the true character of the kings and their relation to Jehovah might be made intelligible to the people. The only piety which the chronicler could conceive was combined with observance of the Law; naturally therefore it was only thus that he could describe piety. His work would be read with eager interest, and would play a definite and

useful part in the religious education of the people. It would bring home to them, as the older histories could not, the abiding presence of Jehovah with Israel and its leaders. Chronicles interpreted history to its own generation by translating older records into the circumstances and ideas of its own time.

And in this it remains our example. Chronicles may fall very far short of the ideal and yet be superior to more accurate histories which fail to make themselves intelligible to their own generation. The ideal history no doubt would tell the story with archæological precision, and then interpret it by modern parallels; the historian would show us what we should actually have seen and heard if we had lived in the period he is describing; he would also help our weak imagination by pointing us to such modern events or persons as best illustrate those ancient times. No doubt Chronicles fails to bring before our eyes an accurate vision of the history of the monarchy; but, as we have said, all history fails somewhat in this respect. It is simply impossible to fulfil the demand for history that shall have the accuracy of an architect's plans of a house or an astronomer's diagrams of the orbit of a planet. Chronicles, however, fails more seriously than most history, and on the whole rather more than most commentaries and sermons.

But this lack of archæological accuracy is far less serious than a failure to make it clear that the events of ancient history were as real and as interesting as those of modern times, and that its personages were actual men and women, with a full equipment of body, mind, and soul. There have been many teachers and preachers, innocent of archæology, who have yet been able to apply Bible narratives with convincing power

to the hearts and consciences of their hearers. They may have missed some points and misunderstood others, but they have brought out clearly the main, practical teaching of their subject; and we must not allow amusement at curious anachronisms to blind us to their great gifts in applying ancient history to modern circumstances. For instance, the little captive maid in the story of Naaman has been described by a local preacher as having illuminated texts hung up in her bedroom, and (perambulators not being then in use) as having constructed a go-cart for the baby out of an old tea-chest and four cotton reels. We feel inclined to smile; but, after all, such a picture would make children feel that the captive maid was a girl whom they could understand and might even imitate. A more correct version of the story, told with less human interest, might leave the impression that she was a mere animated doll in a quaint costume, who made impossibly pious remarks.

Enlightened and well-informed Christian teachers may still learn something from the example of the chronicler. The uncritical character of his age affords no excuse to them for shutting their eyes to the fuller light which God has given to their generation. But we are reminded that permanently significant stories have their parallels in every age. There are always prodigal sons, and foolish virgins, importunate widows, and good Samaritans. The ancient narratives are interesting as quaint and picturesque stories of former times; but it is our duty as teachers to discover the modern parallels of their eternal meaning: their lessons are often best enforced by telling them afresh as they would have been told if their authors had lived in our time, in other words by a frank use of anachronism.

It may be objected that the result in the case of Chronicles is not encouraging. Chronicles is far less interesting than Kings, and far less useful in furnishing materials for the historian. These facts, however, are not inconsistent with the usefulness of the book for its own age. Teaching by anachronism simply seeks to render a service to its own generation; its purpose is didactic, and not historical. How many people read the sermons of eighteenth-century divines? But each generation has a right to this special service. The first duty of the religious teacher is for the men and women that look to him for spiritual help and guidance. He may incidentally produce literary work of permanent value for posterity; but a Church whose ministry sacrificed practical usefulness in the attempt to be learned and literary would be false to its most sacred functions. The noblest self-denial of Christian service may often lie in putting aside all such ambition and devoting the ability which might have made a successful author to making Divine truth intelligible and interesting to the uncultured and the unimaginative. Authors themselves are sometimes led to make a similar sacrifice; they write to help the many to-day when they might have written to delight men of literary taste in all ages. Few things are so ephemeral as popular religious literature; it is as quickly and entirely forgotten as last year's sunsets: but it is as necessary and as useful as the sunshine and the clouds, which are being always spent and always renewed. Chronicles is a specimen of this class of literature, and its presence in the canon testifies to the duty of providing a special application of the sacred truths of ancient history for each succeeding generation.

BOOK III

MESSIANIC AND OTHER TYPES

CHAPTER I

TEACHING BY TYPES

A MORE serious charge has been brought against Chronicles than that dealt with in the last chapter. Besides anachronisms, additions, and alterations, the chronicler has made omissions that give an entirely new complexion to the history. He omits, for instance, almost everything that detracts from the character and achievements of David and Solomon; he almost entirely ignores the reigns of Saul and Ishbosheth, and of all the northern kings. These facts are obvious to the most casual reader, and a moment's reflection shows that David as we should know him if we had only Chronicles is entirely different from the historical David of Samuel and Kings. The latter David has noble qualities, but displays great weakness and falls into grievous sin; the David of Chronicles is almost always an hero and a blameless saint.

All this is unquestionably true, and yet the purpose and spirit of Chronicles are honest and praiseworthy. Our judgment must be governed by the relation which the chronicler intended his work to sustain towards the older history. Did he hope that Samuel and Kings would be altogether superseded by this new version of the history of the monarchy, and so eventually be

suppressed and forgotten? There were precedents that might have encouraged such a hope. The Pentateuch and the books from Joshua to Kings derived their material from older works; but the older works were superseded by these books, and entirely disappeared. The circumstances, however, were different when the chronicler wrote: Samuel and Kings had been established for centuries. Moreover, the Jewish community in Babylon still exercised great influence over the Palestinian Jews. Copies of Samuel and Kings must have been preserved at Babylon, and their possessors could not be eager to destroy them, and then to incur the expense of replacing them by copies of a history written at Jerusalem from the point of view of the priests and Levites. We may therefore put aside the theory that Chronicles was intended altogether to supersede Samuel and Kings. Another possible theory is that the chronicler, after the manner of mediæval historians, composed an abstract of the history of the world from the Creation to the Captivity as an introduction to his account in Ezra and Nehemiah of the more recent post-Exilic period. This theory has some truth in it, but does not explain the fact that Chronicles is disproportionately long if it be merely such an introduction. Probably the chronicler's main object was to compose a text-book, which could safely and usefully be placed in the hands of the common people. There were obvious objections to the popular use of Samuel and Kings. In making a selection from his material, the chronicler had no intention of falsifying history. Scholars, he knew, would be acquainted with the older books, and could supplement his narrative from the sources which he himself had used. In his own work he was anxious to confine himself to the portions of the

history which had an obvious religious significance, and could readily be used for purposes of edification. He was only applying more thoroughly a principle that had guided his predecessors. The Pentateuch itself is the result of a similar selection, only there and in the other earlier histories a very human interest in dramatic narrative has sometimes interfered with an exclusive attention to edification.

Indeed, the principles of selection adopted by the chronicler are common to many historians. A school history does not dwell on the domestic vices of kings or on the private failings of statesmen. It requires no great stretch of imagination to conceive of a Royalist history of England, that should entirely ignore the Commonwealth. Indeed, historians of Christian missions sometimes show about the same interest in the work of other Churches than their own that Chronicles takes in the northern kingdom. The work of the chronicler may also be compared to monographs which confine themselves to some special aspect of their subject. We have every reason to be thankful that the Divine providence has preserved for us the richer and fuller narrative of Samuel and Kings, but we cannot blame the chronicler because he has observed some of the ordinary canons for the composition of historical text-books.

The chronicler's selective method, however, is carried so far that the historical value of his work is seriously impaired; yet in this respect also he is kept in countenance by very respectable authorities. We are more concerned, however, to point out the positive results of the method. Instead of historical portraits, we are presented with a gallery of ideals, types of character which we are asked either to admire or to condemn. On

the one hand, we have David and Solomon, Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, and the rest of the reforming kings of Judah; on the other hand, there are Jeroboam, and Ahab, and Ahaz, the kings of Israel, and the bad kings of Judah. All these are very sharply defined in either white or black. The types of Chronicles are ideals, and not studies of ordinary human character, with its mingled motives and subtle gradations of light and shade. The chronicler has nothing in common with the authors of modern realistic novels or anecdotal memoirs. His subject is not human nature as it is so much as human nature as it ought to be. There is obviously much to be learnt from such ideal pictures, and this form of inspired teaching is by no means the least effective; it may be roughly compared with our Lord's method of teaching by parables, without, however, at all putting the two upon the same level.

Before examining these types in detail, we may devote a little space to some general considerations upon teaching by types. For the present we will confine ourselves to a non-theological sense of type, using the word to mean any individual who is representative or typical of a class. But the chronicler's individuals do not represent classes of actual persons, but good men as they seem to their most devoted admirers and bad men as they seem to their worst enemies. They are ideal types. Chronicles is not the only literature in which such ideal types are found. They occur in the funeral sermons and obituary notices of popular favourites, and in the pictures which politicians draw in election speeches of their opponents, only in these there is a note of personal feeling from which the chronicler is free.

In fact, all biography tends to idealise; human nature

as it is has generally to be looked for in the pages of fiction. When we have been blessed with a good and brave man, we wish to think of him at his best; we are not anxious to have thrust upon our notice the weaknesses and sins which he regretted and for the most part controlled. Some one who loved and honoured him is asked to write the biography, with a tacit understanding that he is not to give us a picture of the real man in the *déshabille*, as it were, of his own inner consciousness. He is to paint us a portrait of the man as he strove to fashion himself after his own high ideal. The true man, as God knows him and as his fellows should remember him, was the man in his higher nature and nobler aspirations. The rest, surely, was but the vanishing remnant of a repudiated self. The biographer idealises, because he believes that the ideal best represents the real man. This is what the chronicler, with a large faith and liberal charity, has done for David and Solomon.

Such an ideal picture appeals to us with pathetic emphasis. It seems to say, "In spite of temptation, and sin, and grievous falls, this is what I ever aimed at and desired to be. Do not thou content thyself with any lower ideal. My higher nature had its achievements as well as its aspirations. Remember that in thy weakness thou mayest also achieve."

> "What I aspired to be,
> And was not, comforts me;
> * * * *
> All I could never be,
> All men ignored in me,
> This I was worth to God. . . ."

But we may take these ideals as types, not only in a general sense, but also in a modification of the

dogmatic meaning of the word. We are not concerned here with the type as the mere external symbol of truth yet to be revealed; such types are chiefly found in the ritual of the Pentateuch. The circumstances of a man's life may also serve as a type in the narrower sense, but we venture to apply the theological idea of type to the significance of the higher nature in a good man. It has been said in reference to types in the theological sense that "a type is neither a prophecy, nor a symbol, nor an allegory, yet it has relations with each of these. A prophecy is a prediction in words, a type a prediction in things. A symbol is a sensuous representation of a thing; a type is such a representation having a distinctly predictive aspect: . . . a type is an enacted prophecy, a kind of prophecy by action."[1] We cannot, of course, include in our use of the term type "sensuous representation" and some other ideas connected with "type" in a theological sense. Our type is a prediction in persons rather than in things. But the use of the term is justified as including the most essential point: that "a type is an enacted prophecy, a kind of prophecy by action." These personal types are the most real and significant; they have no mere arbitrary or conventional relation to their antitype. The enacted prophecy is the beginning of its own fulfilment, the first-fruits of the greater harvest that is to be. The better moments of the man who is hungering and thirsting after righteousness are a type, a promise, and prophecy of his future satisfaction. They have also a wider and deeper meaning: they show what is possible for humanity, and give an assurance of the spiritual progress of the world. The elect remnant

[1] Cave, *Scripture Doctrine of Sacrifice*, p. 163.

of Israel were the type of the great Christian Church; the spiritual aspirations and persistent faith of a few believers were a prophecy that "the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, . . . which is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree." When therefore the chronicler ignores the evil in David and Solomon and only records the good, he treats them as types. He takes what was best in them and sets it forth as a standard and prophecy for the future, a pattern in the mount to be realised hereafter in the structure of God's spiritual temple upon earth.

But the Holy Spirit guided the hopes and intuitions of the sacred writers to a special fulfilment. We can see that their types have one antitype in the growth of the Church and the progress of mankind; but the Old Testament looked for their chief fulfilment in a Divine Messenger and Deliverer: its ideals are types of the Messiah. The higher life of a good man was a revelation of God and a promise of His highest and best manifestation in Christ. We shall endeavour to show in subsequent chapters how Chronicles served to develop the idea of the Messiah.

But the chronicler's types are not all prophecies of future progress or Messianic glory. The brighter portions of his picture are thrown into relief by a dark background. The good in Jeroboam is as completely ignored as the evil in David. Apart from any question of historical accuracy, the type is unfortunately a true one. There is a leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod, as well as a leaven of the kingdom. If the base leaven be left to work by itself, it will leaven the whole mass;

and in a final estimate of the character of those who do evil "with both hands earnestly," little allowance needs to be made for redeeming features. Even if we are still able to believe that there is a seed of goodness in things evil, we are forced to admit that the seed has remained dead and unfertilised, has had no growth and borne no fruit. But probably most men may sometimes be profitably admonished by considering the typical sinner—the man in whose nature evil has been able to subdue all things to itself.

The strange power of teaching by types has been well expressed by one who was herself a great mistress of the art: "Ideas are often poor ghosts: our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapour, and cannot make themselves felt; they breathe upon us with warm breath, they touch us with soft, responsive hands; they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul; . . . their presence is a power." [1]

[1] George Eliot, *Janet's Repentance*, chap. xix.

CHAPTER II

DAVID—I. HIS TRIBE AND DYNASTY

KING and kingdom were so bound up in ancient life that an ideal for the one implied an ideal for the other; all distinction and glory possessed by either was shared by both. The tribe and kingdom of Judah were exalted by the fame of David and Solomon; but, on the other hand, a specially exalted position is accorded to David in the Old Testament because he is the representative of the people of Jehovah. David himself had been anointed by Divine command to be king of Israel, and he thus became the founder of the only legitimate dynasty of Hebrew kings. Saul and Ishbosheth had no significance for the later religious history of the nation. Apparently to the chronicler the history of true religion in Israel was a blank between Joshua and David; the revival began when the Ark was brought to Zion, and the first steps were taken to rear the Temple in succession to the Mosaic tabernacle. He therefore omits the history of the Judges and Saul. But the battle of Gilboa is given to introduce the reign of David, and incidental condemnation is passed on Saul: "So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the Lord, because of the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for that he asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire

thereby, and inquired not of the Lord; therefore He slew him and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

The reign of Saul had been an unsuccessful experiment; its only real value had been to prepare the way for David. At the same time the portrait of Saul is not given at full length, like those of the wicked kings, partly perhaps because the chronicler had little interest for anything before the time of David and the Temple, but partly, we may hope, because the record of David's affection for Saul kept alive a kindly feeling towards the founder of the monarchy.

Inasmuch as Jehovah had "turned the kingdom unto David," the reign of Ishbosheth was evidently the intrusion of an illegitimate pretender; and the chronicler treats it as such. If we had only Chronicles, we should know nothing about the reign of Ishbosheth, and should suppose that, on the death of Saul, David succeeded at once to an undisputed sovereignty over all Israel. The interval of conflict is ignored because, according to the chronicler's views, David was, from the first, king *de jure* over the whole nation. Complete silence as to Ishbosheth was the most effective way of expressing this fact.

The same sentiment of hereditary legitimacy, the same formal and exclusive recognition of a *de jure* sovereign, has been shown in modern times by titles like Louis XVIII. and Napoleon III. For both schools of Legitimists the absence of *de facto* sovereignty did not prevent Louis XVII. and Napoleon II. from having been lawful rulers of France. In Israel, moreover, the Divine right of the one chosen dynasty had religious as well as political importance. We have already seen that Israel claimed a hereditary title to

its special privileges; it was therefore natural that a hereditary qualification should be thought necessary for the kings. They represented the nation; they were the Divinely appointed guardians of its religion; they became in time the types of the Messiah, its promised Saviour. In all this Saul and Ishbosheth had neither part nor lot; the promise to Israel had always descended in a direct line, and the special promise that was given to its kings and through them to their people began with David. There was no need to carry the history further back.

We have already noticed that, in spite of this general attitude towards Saul, the genealogy of some of his descendants is given twice over in the earlier chapters. No doubt the chronicler made this concession to gratify friends or to conciliate an influential family. It is interesting to note how personal feeling may interfere with the symmetrical development of a theological theory. At the same time we are enabled to discern a practical reason for rigidly ignoring the kingship of Saul and Ishbosheth. To have recognised Saul as the Lord's anointed, like David, would have complicated contemporary dogmatics, and might possibly have given rise to jealousies between the descendants of Saul and those of David. Within the narrow limits of the Jewish community such quarrels might have been inconvenient and even dangerous.

The reasons for denying the legitimacy of the northern kings were obvious and conclusive. Successful rebels who had destroyed the political and religious unity of Israel could not inherit "the sure mercies of David" or be included in the covenant which secured the permanence of his dynasty.

The exclusive association of Messianic ideas with a

single family emphasises their antiquity, continuity, and development. The hope of Israel had its roots deep in the history of the people; it had grown with their growth and maintained itself through their changing fortunes. As the hope centred in a single family, men were led to expect an individual personal Messiah; they were being prepared to see in Christ the fulfilment of all righteousness.

But the choice of the house of David involved the choice of the tribe of Judah and the rejection of the kingdom of Samaria. The ten tribes, as well as the kings of Israel, had cut themselves off both from the Temple and the sacred dynasty, and therefore from the covenant into which Jehovah had entered with "the man after his own heart." Such a limitation of the chosen people was suggested by many precedents. Chronicles, following the Pentateuch, tells how the call came to Abraham, but only some of the descendants of one of his sons inherited the promise. Why should not a selection be made from among the sons of Jacob? But the twelve tribes had been explicitly and solemnly included in the unity of Israel, largely through David himself. The glory of David and Solomon consisted in their sovereignty over a united people. The national recollection of this golden age loved to dwell on the union of the twelve tribes. The Pentateuch added legal sanction to ancient sentiment. The twelve tribes were associated together in national lyrics, like the "Blessing of Jacob" and the "Blessing of Moses." The song of Deborah told how the northern tribes "came to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It was simply impossible for the chronicler to absolutely repudiate the ten tribes; and so they are formally included in the genealogies of Israel, and are recognised in the history of David and

Solomon. Then the recognition stops. From the time of the disruption the northern kingdom is quietly but persistently ignored. Its prophets and sanctuaries were as illegitimate as its kings. The great struggle of Elijah and Elisha for the honour of Jehovah is omitted, with all the rest of their history. Elijah is only mentioned as sending a letter to Jehoram, king of Judah; Elisha is never even named.

On the other hand, it is more than once implied that Judah, with the Levites, and the remnants of Simeon and Benjamin, are the true Israel. When Rehoboam "was strong he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him." After Shishak's invasion, "the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves."[1] The annals of Manasseh, king of Judah, are said to be "written among the acts of the kings of Israel."[2] The register of the exiles who returned with Zerubbabel is headed "The number of the men of the people of Israel."[3] The chronicler tacitly anticipates the position of St. Paul: "They are not all Israel which are of Israel"; and the Apostle might have appealed to Chronicles to show that the majority of Israel might fail to recognise and accept the Divine purpose for Israel, and that the true Israel would then be found in an elect remnant. The Jews of the second Temple naturally and inevitably came to ignore the ten tribes and to regard themselves as constituting this true Israel. As a matter of history, there had been a period during which the prophets of Samaria were of far more importance to the religion of Jehovah than the temple at Jerusalem; but in the chronicler's time the very existence of the ten tribes was ancient history. Then, at any rate,

[1] 2 Chron. xii. 1, 6. [2] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 18.
[3] Ezra ii. 2.

it was true that God's Israel was to be found in the Jewish community, at and around Jerusalem. They inherited the religious spirit of their fathers, and received from them the sacred writings and traditions, and carried on the sacred ritual. They preserved the truth and transmitted it from generation to generation, till at last it was merged in the mightier stream of Christian revelation.

The attitude of the chronicler towards the prophets of the northern kingdom does not in any way represent the actual importance of these prophets to the religion of Israel; but it is a very striking expression of the fact that after the Captivity the ten tribes had long ceased to exercise any influence upon the spiritual life of their nation.

The chronicler's attitude is also open to criticism on another side. He is dominated by his own surroundings, and in his references to the Judaism of his own time there is no formal recognition of the Jewish community in Babylon; and yet even his own casual allusions confirm what we know from other sources, namely that the wealth and learning of the Jews in Babylon were an important factor in Judaism until a very late date. This point perhaps rather concerns Ezra and Nehemiah than Chronicles, but it is closely connected with our present subject, and is most naturally treated along with it. The chronicler might have justified himself by saying that the true home of Israel must be in Palestine, and that a community in Babylon could only be considered as subsidiary to the nation in its own home and worshipping at the Temple. Such a sentiment, at any rate, would have met with universal approval amongst Palestinian Jews. The chronicler might also have replied that the Jews in

Babylon belonged to Judah and Benjamin and were sufficiently recognised in the general prominence given to these tribes. In all probability some Palestinian Jews would have been willing to class their Babylonian kinsmen with the ten tribes. Voluntary exiles from the Temple, the Holy City, and the Land of Promise had in great measure cut themselves off from the full privileges of the people of Jehovah. If, however, we had a Babylonian book of Chronicles, we should see both Jerusalem and Babylon in another light.

The chronicler was possessed and inspired by the actual living present round about him; he was content to let the dead past bury its dead. He was probably inclined to believe that the absent are mostly wrong, and that the men who worked with him for the Lord and His temple were the true Israel and the Church of God. He was enthusiastic in his own vocation and loyal to his brethren. If his interests were somewhat narrowed by the urgency of present circumstances, most men suffer from the same limitations. Few Englishmen realise that the battle of Agincourt is part of the history of the United States, and that Canterbury Cathedral is a monument of certain stages in the growth of the religion of New England. We are not altogether willing to admit that these voluntary exiles from our Holy Land belong to the true Anglo-Saxon Israel.

Churches are still apt to ignore their obligations to teachers who, like the prophets of Samaria, seem to have been associated with alien or hostile branches of the family of God. A religious movement which fails to secure for itself a permanent monument is usually labelled heresy. If it has neither obtained recognition within the Church nor yet organised a sect

for itself, its services are forgotten or denied. Even the orthodoxy of one generation is sometimes contemptuous of the older orthodoxy which made it possible; and yet Gnostics, Arians and Athanasians, Arminians and Calvinists, have all done something to build up the temple of faith.

The nineteenth century prides itself on a more liberal spirit. But Romanist historians are not eager to acknowledge the debt of their Church to the Reformers; and there are Protestant partisans who deny that we are the heirs of the Christian life and thought of the mediæval Church and are anxious to trace the genealogy of pure religion exclusively through a supposed succession of obscure and half-mythical sects. Limitations like those of the chronicler still narrow the sympathies of earnest and devout Christians.

But it is time to return to the more positive aspects of the teaching of Chronicles, and to see how far we have already traced its exposition of the Messianic idea. The plan of the book implies a spiritual claim on behalf of the Jewish community of the Restoration. Because they believed in Jehovah, whose providence had in former times controlled the destinies of Israel, they returned to their ancestral home that they might serve and worship the God of their fathers. Their faith survived the ruin of Judah and their own captivity; they recognised the power, and wisdom, and love of God alike in the prosperity and in the misfortunes of their race. "They believed God, and it was counted unto them for righteousness." The great prophet of the Restoration had regarded this new Israel as itself a Messianic people, perhaps even "a light to the Gentiles" and "salvation unto the ends of the earth."[1] The

[1] Isa. xlix. 6.

chronicler's hopes were more modest; the new Jerusalem had been seen by the prophet as an ideal vision; the historian knew it by experience as an imperfect human society: but he believed none the less in its high spiritual vocation and prerogatives. He claimed the future for those who were able to trace the hand of God in their past.

Under the monarchy the fortunes of Jerusalem had been bound up with those of the house of David. The chronicler brings out all that was best in the history of the ancient kings of Judah, that this ideal picture of the state and its rulers might encourage and inspire to future hope and effort. The character and achievements of David and his successors were of permanent significance. The grace and favour accorded to them symbolised the Divine promise for the future, and this promise was to be realised through a Son of David.

CHAPTER III

DAVID—II. HIS PERSONAL HISTORY

IN order to understand why the chronicler entirely recasts the graphic and candid history of David given in the book of Samuel, we have to consider the place that David had come to fill in Jewish religion. It seems probable that among the sources used by the author of the book of Samuel was a history of David, written not long after his death, by some one familiar with the inner life of the court. "No one," says the proverb, "is an hero to his valet"; very much what a valet is to a private gentleman courtiers are to a king: their knowledge of their master approaches to the familiarity which breeds contempt. Not that David was ever a subject for contempt or less than an hero even to his own courtiers; but they knew him as a very human hero, great in his vices as well as in his virtues, daring in battle and wise in counsel, sometimes also reckless in sin, yet capable of unbounded repentance, loving not wisely, but too well. And as they knew him, so they described him; and their picture is an immortal possession for all students of sacred life and literature. But it is not the portrait of a Messiah; when we think of the "Son of David," we do not want to be reminded of Bath-sheba.

During the six or seven centuries that elapsed be-

tween the death of David and the chronicler, the name of David had come to have a symbolic meaning, which was largely independent of the personal character and career of the actual king. His reign had become idealised by the magic of antiquity; it was a glory of "the good old times." His own sins and failures were obscured by the crimes and disasters of later kings. And yet, in spite of all its shortcomings, the "house of David" still remained the symbol alike of ancient glory and of future hopes. We have seen from the genealogies how intimate the connection was between the family and its founder. Ephraim and Benjamin may mean either patriarchs or tribes. A Jew was not always anxious to distinguish between the family and the founder. "David" and "the house of David" became almost interchangeable terms.

Even the prophets of the eighth century connect the future destiny of Israel with David and his house. The child, of whom Isaiah prophesied, was to sit "upon the throne of David" and be "over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with judgment and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever."[1] And, again, the king who is to "sit . . . in truth, . . . judging, and seeking judgment, and swift to do righteousness," is to have "his throne . . . established in mercy in the tent of David."[2] When Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem, the city was defended[3] for Jehovah's own sake and for His servant David's sake. In the word of the Lord that came to Isaiah for Hezekiah, David supersedes, as it were, the sacred fathers of the Hebrew race; Jehovah is not spoken of as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," but "the God of David."[4]

[1] Isa. ix. 7.
[2] Isa. xvi. 5.
[3] Isa. xxxvii. 35.
[4] Isa. xxxviii. 5.

As founder of the dynasty, he takes rank with the founders of the race and religion of Israel: he is "the patriarch David."[1] The northern prophet Hosea looks forward to the time when "the children of Israel shall return, and seek the Lord their God and David their king"[2]; when Amos wishes to set forth the future prosperity of Israel, he says that the Lord "will raise up the tabernacle of David"[3]; in Micah "the ruler in Israel" is to come forth from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the birthplace of David[4]; in Jeremiah such references to David are frequent, the most characteristic being those relating to the "righteous branch, whom the Lord will raise up unto David," who "shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land, in whose days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely"[5]; in Ezekiel "My servant David" is to be the shepherd and prince of Jehovah's restored and reunited people[6]; Zechariah, writing at what we may consider the beginning of the chronicler's own period, follows the language of his predecessors: he applies Jeremiah's prophecy of "the righteous branch" to Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David[7]: similarly in Haggai Zerubbabel is the chosen of Jehovah[8]; in the appendix to Zechariah it is said that when "the Lord defends the inhabitants of Jerusalem" "the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them."[9] In the later

[1] Acts ii. 29.
[2] Hos. iii. 5.
[3] Amos ix. 11.
[4] Micah v. 2.
[5] Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; cf. xxxiii. 15 and Isa. iv. 2, xi. 1. The Hebrew word used in the last passage is different from that in the preceding.
[6] Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25.
[7] Zech. iii. 8; the text in vi. 12 is probably corrupt. Hag. ii. 23.
[8] Zech. xii. 8.

literature, Biblical and apocryphal, the Davidic origin of the Messiah is not conspicuous till it reappears in the Psalms of Solomon[1] and the New Testament, but the idea had not necessarily been dormant meanwhile. The chronicler and his school studied and meditated on the sacred writings, and must have been familiar with this doctrine of the prophets. The interest in such a subject would not be confined to scholars. Doubtless the downtrodden people cherished with ever-growing ardour the glorious picture of the Davidic king. In the synagogues it was not only Moses, but the Prophets, that were read; and they could never allow the picture of the Messianic king to grow faint and pale.[2]

David's name was also familiar as the author of many psalms. The inhabitants of Jerusalem would often hear them sung at the Temple, and they were probably used for private devotion. In this way especially the name of David had become associated with the deepest and purest spiritual experiences.

This brief survey shows how utterly impossible it was for the chronicler to transfer the older narrative bodily from the book of Samuel to his own pages. Large omissions were absolutely necessary. He could not sit down in cold blood to tell his readers that the man whose name they associated with the most sacred memories and the noblest hopes of Israel had been guilty of treacherous murder, and had offered himself to the Philistines as an ally against the people of Jehovah.

From this point of view let us consider the chronicler's omissions somewhat more in detail. In the first place,

[1] Written after the death of Pompey.

[2] Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, ii. 444.

with one or two slight exceptions, he omits the whole of David's life before his accession to the throne, for two reasons: partly because he is anxious that his readers should think of David as king, the anointed of Jehovah, the Messiah; partly that they may not be reminded of his career as an outlaw and a freebooter and of his alliance with the Philistines.[1] It is probably only an unintentional result of this omission that it enables the chronicler to ignore the important services rendered to David by Abiathar, whose family were rivals of the house of Zadok in the priesthood.

We have already seen that the events of David's reign at Hebron and his struggle with Ishbosheth are omitted because the chronicler does not recognise Ishbosheth as a legitimate king. The omission would also commend itself because this section contains the account of Joab's murder of Abner and David's inability to do more than protest against the crime. "I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for me,"[2] are scarcely words that become an ideal king.

The next point to notice is one of those significant alterations that mark the chronicler's industry as a redactor. In 2 Sam. v. 21 we read that after the Philistines had been defeated at Baal-perazim they left their images there, and David and his men took them away. Why did they take them away? What did David and his men want with images? Missionaries bring home images as trophies, and exhibit them triumphantly, like soldiers who have captured the enemy's standards. No one, not even an unconverted native, supposes that they have been brought away to be used

[1] An incidental reference is made to these facts in 1 Chron. xii. 19.
[2] 2 Sam. iii. 39.

in worship. But the worship of images was no improbable apostacy on the part of an Israelite king. The chronicler felt that these ambiguous words were open to misconstruction; so he tells us what he assumes to have been their ultimate fate: "And they left their gods there; and David gave commandment, and they were burnt with fire."[1]

The next omission was obviously a necessary one; it is the incident of Uriah and Bath-sheba. The name Bath-sheba never occurs in Chronicles. When it is necessary to mention the mother of Solomon, she is called Bath-shua, possibly in order that the disgraceful incident might not be suggested even by the use of the name. The New Testament genealogies differ in this matter in somewhat the same way as Samuel and Chronicles. St. Matthew expressly mentions Uriah's wife as an ancestress of our Lord, but St. Luke does not mention her or any other ancestress.

The next omission is equally extensive and important. It includes the whole series of events connected with the revolt of Absalom, from the incident of Tamar to the suppression of the rebellion of Sheba the son of Bichri. Various motives may have contributed to this omission. The narrative contains unedifying incidents, which are passed over as lightly as possible by modern writers like Stanley. It was probably a relief to the chronicler to be able to omit them altogether. There is no heinous sin like the murder of Uriah, but the story leaves a general impression of great weakness on David's part. Joab murders Amasa as he had murdered Abner, and this time there is no record of any protest even on the part of David. But probably the main

[1] **2 Sam. v. 21**; 1 Chron. xiv. 12.

reason for the omission of this narrative is that it mars the ideal picture of David's power and dignity and the success and prosperity of his reign.

The touching story of Rizpah is omitted; the hanging of her sons does not exhibit David in a very amiable light. The Gibeonites propose that "they shall hang them up unto the Lord in Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord," and David accepts the proposal. This punishment of the children for the sin of their father was expressly against the Law[1]; and the whole incident was perilously akin to human sacrifice. How could they be hung up before Jehovah in Gibeah unless there was a sanctuary of Jehovah in Gibeah? And why should Saul at such a time and in such a connection be called emphatically "the chosen of Jehovah"? On many grounds, it was a passage which the chronicler would be glad to omit.

In 2 Sam. xxi. 15–17 we are told that David waxed faint and had to be rescued by Abishai. This is omitted by Chronicles probably because it detracts from the character of David as the ideal hero. The next paragraph in Samuel also tended to depreciate David's prowess. It stated that Goliath was slain by Elhanan. The chronicler introduces a correction. It was not Goliath whom Elhanan slew, but Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. However, the text in Samuel is evidently corrupt; and possibly this is one of the cases in which Chronicles has preserved the correct text.[2]

Then follow two omissions that are not easily accounted for. 2 Sam. xxii., xxiii., contain two psalms, Psalm xviii. and "the Last Words of David," the latter not included in the Psalter. These psalms are generally

[1] Deut. xxiv. 16, quoted in 2 Chron. xxv. 4.

[2] 2 Sam. xxi. 19; 1 Chron. xx. 5.

considered a late addition to the book of Samuel, and it is barely possible that they were not in the copy used by the chronicler; but the late date of Chronicles makes against this supposition. The psalms may be omitted for the sake of brevity, and yet elsewhere a long cento of passages from post-Exilic psalms is added to the material derived from the book of Samuel. Possibly something in the omitted section jarred upon the theological sensibilities of the chronicler, but it is not clear what. He does not as a rule look below the surface for obscure suggestions of undesirable views. The grounds of his alterations and omissions are usually sufficiently obvious; but these particular omissions are not at present susceptible of any obvious explanation. Further research into the theology of Judaism may perhaps provide us with one hereafter.

Finally, the chronicler omits the attempt of Adonijah to seize the throne, and David's dying commands to Solomon. The opening chapters of the book of Kings present a graphic and pathetic picture of the closing scenes of David's life. The king is exhausted with old age. His authoritative sanction to the coronation of Solomon is only obtained when he has been roused and directed by the promptings and suggestions of the women of his harem. The scene is partly a parallel and partly a contrast to the last days of Queen Elizabeth; for when *her* bodily strength failed, the obstinate Tudor spirit refused to be guided by the suggestions of her courtiers. The chronicler was depicting a person of almost Divine dignity, in whom incidents of human weakness would have been out of keeping; and therefore they are omitted.

David's charge to Solomon is equally human. Solomon is to make up for David's weakness and

undue generosity by putting Joab and Shimei to death; on the other hand, he is to pay David's debt of gratitude to the son of Barzillai. But the chronicler felt that David's mind in those last days must surely have been occupied with the temple which Solomon was to build, and the less edifying charge is omitted.

Constantine is reported to have said that, for the honour of the Church, he would conceal the sin of a bishop with his own imperial purple. David was more to the chronicler than the whole Christian episcopate to Constantine. His life of David is compiled in the spirit and upon the principles of lives of saints generally, and his omissions are made in perfect good faith.

Let us now consider the positive picture of David as it is drawn for us in Chronicles. Chronicles would be published separately, each copy written out on a roll of its own. There may have been Jews who had Chronicles, but not Samuel and Kings, and who knew nothing about David except what they learned from Chronicles. Possibly the chronicler and his friends would recommend the work as suitable for the education of children and the instruction of the common people. It would save its readers from being perplexed by the religious difficulties suggested by Samuel and Kings. There were many obstacles, however, to the success of such a scheme; the persecutions of Antiochus and the wars of the Maccabees took the leadership out of the hands of scholars and gave it to soldiers and statesmen. The latter perhaps felt more drawn to the real David than to the ideal, and the new priestly dynasty would not be anxious to emphasise the Messianic hopes of the house of David. But let us put ourselves for a moment in the position of a student of Hebrew history who

reads of David for the first time in Chronicles and has no other source of information.

Our first impression as we read the book is that David comes into the history as abruptly as Elijah or Melchizedek. Jehovah slew Saul "and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."[1] Apparently the Divine appointment is promptly and enthusiastically accepted by the nation; all the twelve tribes come at once in their tens and hundreds of thousands to Hebron to make David king. They then march straight to Jerusalem and take it by storm, and forthwith attempt to bring up the Ark to Zion. An unfortunate accident necessitates a delay of three months, but at the end of that time the Ark is solemnly installed in a tent at Jerusalem.[2]

We are not told who David the son of Jesse was, or why the Divine choice fell upon him, or how he had been prepared for his responsible position, or how he had so commended himself to Israel as to be accepted with universal acclaim. He must, however, have been of noble family and high character; and it is hinted that he had had a distinguished career as a soldier.[3] We should expect to find his name in the introductory genealogies; and if we have read these lists of names with conscientious attention, we shall remember that there are sundry incidental references to David, and that he was the seventh son of Jesse,[4] who was descended from the Patriarch Judah, through Boaz, the husband of Ruth.

As we read further we come to other references which throw some light on David's early career, and at the same time somewhat mar the symmetry of the

[1] 1 Chron. x. 14.
[2] Cf. xi. 1–9; xii. 23–xiii. 14; xv.
[3] 1 Chron. xi. 2.
[4] 1 Chron. ii. 15.

opening narrative. The wide discrepancy between the chronicler's idea of David and the account given by his authorities prevents him from composing his work on an entirely consecutive and consistent plan. We gather that there was a time when David was in rebellion against his predecessor, and maintained himself at Ziklag and elsewhere, keeping "himself close, because of Saul the son of Kish," and even that he came with the Philistines against Saul to battle, but was prevented by the jealousy of the Philistine chiefs from actually fighting against Saul. There is nothing to indicate the occasion or circumstances of these events.[1] But it appears that even at this period, when David was in arms against the king of Israel and an ally of the Philistines, he was the chosen leader of Israel. Men flocked to him from Judah and Benjamin, Manasseh and Gad, and doubtless from the other tribes as well: "From day to day there came to David to help him, until it was a great host like the host of God."[2]

This chapter partly explains David's popularity after Saul's death; but it only carries the mystery a stage further back. How did this outlaw and apparently unpatriotic rebel get so strong a hold on the affections of Israel?

Chap. xii. also provides material for plausible explanations of another difficulty. In chap. x. the army of Israel is routed, the inhabitants of the land take to flight, and the Philistines occupy their cities; in

[1] 1 Chron. xii. 1, 19. There is no certain indication of the date of the events in xi. 10–25. The fact that a "hold" is mentioned in xi. 16, as in xii. 8, 16, is not conclusive proof that they refer to the same period.

[2] xii. 20.

xi. and xii. 23–40 all Israel come straightway to Hebron in the most peaceful and unconcerned fashion to make David king. Are we to understand that his Philistine allies, mindful of that "great host, like the host of God," all at once changed their minds and entirely relinquished the fruits of their victory?

Elsewhere, however, we find a statement that renders other explanations possible. David reigned seven years in Hebron,[1] so that our first impression as to the rapid sequence of events at the beginning of his reign is apparently not correct, and there was time in these seven years for a more gradual expulsion of the Philistines. It is doubtful, however, whether the chronicler intended his original narrative to be thus modified and interpreted.

The main thread of the history is interrupted here and later on[2] to insert incidents which illustrate the personal courage and prowess of David and his warriors. We are also told how busily occupied David was during the three months' sojourn of the Ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. He accepted an alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre; he added to his harem; he successfully repelled two inroads of the Philistines, and made him houses in the city of David.[3]

The narrative returns to its main subject: the history of the sanctuary at Jerusalem. As soon as the Ark was duly installed in its tent, and David was established in his new palace, he was struck by the contrast between the tent and the palace: "Lo, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord dwelleth under curtains." He proposed to substitute a temple for the tent, but was forbidden by his prophet Nathan,

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 27. [2] xi. 10–47; xx. 4–8. [3] xiii. 14–xvi.

through whom God promised him that his son should build the Temple, and that his house should be established for ever.[1]

Then we read of the wars, victories, and conquests of David. He is no longer absorbed in the defence of Israel against the Philistines. He takes the aggressive and conquers Gath; he conquers Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek; he and his armies defeat the Syrians in several battles, the Syrians become tributary, and David occupies Damascus with a garrison. "And the Lord gave victory to David whithersoever he went." The conquered were treated after the manner of those barbarous times. David and his generals carried off much spoil, especially brass, and silver, and gold; and when he conquered Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, "he brought forth the people that were therein, and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes. And thus did David unto all the cities of the children of Ammon." Meanwhile his home administration was as honourable as his foreign wars were glorious: "He executed judgment and justice unto all his people"; and the government was duly organised with commanders of the host and the bodyguard, with priests and scribes.[2]

Then follows a mysterious and painful dispensation of Providence, which the historian would gladly have omitted, if his respect for the memory of his hero had not been overruled by his sense of the supreme importance of the Temple. David, like Job, was given over for a season to Satan, and while possessed by this evil spirit displeased God by numbering Israel. His punishment took the form of a great pestilence, which decimated

[1] xvii. [2] xviii.; xx. 3.

his people, until, by Divine command, David erected an altar in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite and offered sacrifices upon it, whereupon the plague was stayed. David at once perceived the significance of this incident: Jehovah had indicated the site of the future Temple. "This is the house of Jehovah Elohim,[1] and this is the altar of burnt offering for Israel."[2]

This revelation of the Divine will as to the position of the Temple led David to proceed at once with preparations for its erection by Solomon, which occupied all his energies for the remainder of his life.[3] He gathered funds and materials, and gave his son full instructions about the building; he organised the priests and Levites, the Temple orchestra and choir, the doorkeepers, treasurers, officers, and judges; he also organised the army, the tribes, and the royal exchequer on the model of the corresponding arrangements for the Temple.

Then follows the closing scene of David's life. The sun of Israel sets amid the flaming glories of the western sky. No clouds or mists rob him of accustomed splendour. David calls a great assembly of princes and warriors; he addresses a solemn exhortation to them and to Solomon; he delivers to his son instructions for "all the works" which "I have been made to understand in writing from the hand of Jehovah." It is almost as though the plans of the Temple had shared with the first tables of stone the honour of being written with the very finger of God Himself, and David were even greater than Moses. He reminds Solomon of all the preparations he had made, and

[1] *I.e.*, virtually Jehovah our God and the only true God.

[2] For a more detailed treatment of this incident see chap. ix.

[3] xxi.–xxix.

appeals to the princes and the people for further gifts; and they render willingly—thousands of talents of gold, and silver, and brass, and iron. David offers prayer and thanksgiving to the Lord: "And David said to all the congregation, Now bless Jehovah our God. And all the congregation blessed Jehovah, the God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped Jehovah *and the king*. And they sacrificed sacrifices unto Jehovah, and offered burnt offerings unto Jehovah, on the morrow after that day, even a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand lambs, with their drink offerings and sacrifices in abundance for all Israel, and did eat and drink before Jehovah on that day with great gladness. And they made Solomon king; . . . and David died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour, and Solomon his son reigned in his stead."[1]

The Roman expressed his idea of a becoming death more simply: "An emperor should die standing." The chronicler has given us the same view at greater length; this is how the chronicler would have wished to die if he had been David, and how, therefore, he conceives that God honoured the last hours of the man after His own heart.

It is a strange contrast to the companion picture in the book of Kings. There the king is bedridden, dying slowly of old age; the life-blood creeps coldly through his veins. The quiet of the sick-room is invaded by the shrill outcry of an aggrieved woman, and the dying king is roused to hear that once more eager hands are clutching at his crown. If the chronicler has done nothing else, he has helped us

[1] xxix. 20–22, 28.

to appreciate better the gloom and bitterness of the tragedy that was enacted in the last days of David.

What idea does Chronicles give us of the man and his character? He is first and foremost a man of earnest piety and deep spiritual feeling. Like the great religious leaders of the chronicler's own time, his piety found its chief expression in ritual. The main business of his life was to provide for the sanctuary and its services; that is, for the highest fellowship of God and man, according to the ideas then current. But David is no mere formalist; the psalm of thanksgiving for the return of the Ark to Jerusalem is a worthy tribute to the power and faithfulness of Jehovah.[1] His prayer after God had promised to establish his dynasty is instinct with devout confidence and gratitude.[2] But the most gracious and appropriate of these Davidic utterances is his last prayer and thanksgiving for the liberal gifts of the people for the Temple.[3]

Next to David's enthusiasm for the Temple, his most conspicuous qualities are those of a general and soldier: he has great personal strength and courage, and is uniformly successful in wars against numerous and powerful enemies; his government is both able and upright; his great powers as an organiser and administrator are exercised both in secular and ecclesiastical matters; in a word, he is in more senses than one an ideal king.

Moreover, like Alexander, Marlborough, Napoleon, and other epoch-making conquerors, he had a great charm of personal attractiveness; he inspired his officers and soldiers with enthusiasm and devotion to

[1] xvi. 8–36.

[2] xvii. 16–27.

[3] For a short exposition of this passage see Book. IV., Chap. i.

himself. The pictures of all Israel flocking to him in the first days of his reign and even earlier, when he was an outlaw, are forcible illustrations of this wonderful gift; and the same feature of his character is at once illustrated and partly explained by the romantic episode at Adullam. What greater proof of affection could outlaws give to their captain than to risk their lives to get him a draught of water from the well of Bethlehem? How better could David have accepted and ratified their devotion than by pouring out this water as a most precious libation to God?[1] But the chronicler gives most striking expression to the idea of David's popularity when he finally tells us in the same breath that the people worshipped Jehovah and the king.[2]

In drawing an ideal picture, our author has naturally omitted incidents that might have revealed the defects of his hero. Such omissions deceive no one, and are not meant to deceive any one. Yet David's failings are not altogether absent from this history. He has those vices which were characteristic alike of his own age and of the chronicler's, and which indeed are not yet wholly extinct. He could treat his prisoners with barbarous cruelty. His pride led him to number Israel, but his repentance was prompt and thorough; and the incident brings out alike both his faith in God and his care for his people. When the whole episode is before us, it does not lessen our love and respect for David. The reference to his alliance with the Philistines is vague and incidental. If this were our only account of the matter, we should interpret it by the rest of his life, and conclude that if all the facts were known, they would justify his conduct.

[1] 1 Chron. xi. 15–19. [2] xxix. 20.

In forming a general estimate of David according to Chronicles, we may fairly neglect these less satisfactory episodes. Briefly David is perfect saint and perfect king, beloved of God and man.

A portrait reveals the artist as well as the model, and the chronicler in depicting David gives indications of the morality of his own times. We may deduce from his omissions a certain progress in moral sensitiveness. The book of Samuel emphatically condemns David's treachery towards Uriah, and is conscious of the discreditable nature of many incidents connected with the revolts of Absalom and Adonijah; but the silence of Chronicles implies an even severer condemnation. In other matters, however, the chronicler "judges himself in that which he approveth."[1] Of course the first business of an ancient king was to protect his people from their enemies and to enrich them at the expense of their neighbours. The urgency of these duties may excuse, but not justify, the neglect of the more peaceful departments of the administration. The modern reader is struck by the little stress laid by the narrative upon good government at home; it is just mentioned, and that is about all. As the sentiment of international morality is even now only in its infancy, we cannot wonder at its absence from Chronicles; but we are a little surprised to find that cruelty towards prisoners is included without comment in the character of the ideal king.[2] It is curious that the account in the book of Samuel is slightly ambiguous and might possibly admit of a comparatively mild interpretation; but Chronicles, according to the ordinary translation, says definitely, "He *cut* them with saws." The mere

[1] Rom. xiv. 22.

[2] 2 Sam. xii. 31; 1 Chron. xx. 3.

reproduction of this passage need not imply full and deliberate approval of its contents; but it would not have been allowed to remain in the picture of the ideal king, if the chronicler had felt any strong conviction as to the duty of humanity towards one's enemies. Unfortunately we know from the book of Esther and elsewhere that later Judaism had not attained to any wide enthusiasm of humanity.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID—III. HIS OFFICIAL DIGNITY

IN estimating the personal character of David, we have seen that one element of it was his ideal kingship. Apart from his personality, his name is significant for Old Testament theology, as that of the typical king. From the time when the royal title "Messiah" began to be a synonym for the hope of Israel, down to the period when the Anglican Church taught the Divine right of kings, and Calvinists insisted on the Divine sovereignty or royal authority of God, the dignity and power of the King of kings have always been illustrated by, and sometimes associated with, the state of an earthly monarch—whereof David is the most striking example.

The times of the chronicler were favourable to the development of the idea of the perfect king of Israel, the prince of the house of David. There was no king in Israel; and, as far as we can gather, the living representatives of the house of David held no very prominent position in the community. It is much easier to draw a satisfactory picture of the ideal monarch when the imagination is not checked and hampered by the faults and failings of an actual Ahaz or Hezekiah. In earlier times the prophetic hopes for the house of David had often been rudely disappointed, but there had been

ample space to forget the past and to revive the old hopes in fresh splendour and magnificence. Lack of experience helped to commend the idea of the Davidic king to the chronicler. Enthusiasm for a benevolent despot is mostly confined to those who have not enjoyed the privilege of living under such autocratic government.

On the other hand, there was no temptation to flatter any living Davidic king, so that the semi-Divine character of the kingship of David is not set forth after the gross and almost blasphemous style of Roman emperors or Turkish sultans. It is indeed said that the people worshipped Jehovah and the king; but the essential character of Jewish thought made it impossible that the ideal king should sit "in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." David and Solomon could not share with the pagan emperors the honours of Divine worship in their life-time and apotheosis after their death. Nothing addressed to any Hebrew king parallels the panegyric to the Christian emperor Theodosius, in which allusion is made to his "sacred mind," and he is told that "as the Fates are said to assist with their tablets *that God who is the partner in your majesty*, so does some Divine power serve your bidding, which writes down and in due time suggests to your memory the promises which you have made."[1] Nor does Chronicles adorn the kings of Judah with extravagant Oriental titles, such as "King of kings of kings of kings." Devotion to the house of David never oversteps the bounds of a due reverence, but the Hebrew idea of monarchy loses nothing by this salutary reserve.

Indeed, the title of the royal house of Judah rested upon Divine appointment. "Jehovah . . . turned the

[1] Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders*, i. 205.

kingdom unto David; . . . and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of Jehovah by the hand of Samuel."[1] But the Divine choice was confirmed by the cordial consent of the nation; the sovereigns of Judah, like those of England, ruled by the grace of God and the will of the people. Even before David's accession the Israelites had flocked to his standard; and after the death of Saul a great array of the twelve tribes came to Hebron to make David king, "and all the rest also of Israel were of one heart to make David king."[2] Similarly Solomon is the king "whom God hath chosen," and all the congregation make him king and anoint him to be prince.[3] The double election of David by Jehovah and by the nation is clearly set forth in the book of Samuel, and in Chronicles the omission of David's early career emphasises this election. In the book of Samuel we are shown the natural process that brought about the change of dynasty; we see how the Divine choice took effect through the wars between Saul and the Philistines and through David's own ability and energy. Chronicles is mostly silent as to secondary causes, and fixes our attention on the Divine choice as the ultimate ground for David's elevation.

The authority derived from God and the people continued to rest on the same basis. David sought Divine direction alike for the building of the Temple and for his campaigns against the Philistines. At the same time, when he wished to bring up the Ark to Jerusalem, he "consulted with the captains of thousands and of hundreds, even with every leader; and David said unto all the assembly of Israel, If it seem good unto you,

[1] x. 14; xi. 3. [2] xii. 38. [3] xxix. 1, 22.

and if it be of Jehovah our God, . . . let us bring again the ark of our God to us: . . . and all the assembly said that they would do so, for the thing was right in the eyes of all the people."[1] Of course the chronicler does not intend to describe a constitutional monarchy, in which an assembly of the people had any legal status. Apparently in his own time the Jews exercised their measure of local self-government through an informal oligarchy, headed by the high-priest; and these authorities occasionally appealed to an assembly of the people. The administration under the monarchy was carried on in a somewhat similar fashion, only the king had greater authority than the high-priest, and the oligarchy of notables were not so influential as the colleagues of the latter. But apart from any formal constitution the chronicler's description of these incidents involves a recognition of the principle of popular consent in government as well as the doctrine that civil order rests upon a Divine sanction.

It is interesting to see how a member of a great ecclesiastical community, imbued, as we should suppose, with all the spirit of priestcraft, yet insists upon the royal supremacy both in state and Church. But to have done otherwise would have been to go in the teeth of all history; even in the Pentateuch the "king in Jeshurun" is greater than the priest. Moreover, the chronicler was not a priest, but a Levite; and there are indications that the Levites' ancient jealousy of the priests had by no means died out. In Chronicles, at any rate, there is no question of priests interfering with the king's secular administration. They are not even mentioned as obtaining oracles for David as

[1] xiii. 2–4.

Abiathar did before his accession.[1] This was doubtless implied in the original account of the Philistine raids in chap. xiv., but the chronicler may not have understood that "inquiring of God" meant obtaining an oracle from the priests.

The king is equally supreme also in ecclesiastical affairs; we might even say that the civil authorities generally shared this supremacy. Somewhat after the fashion of Cromwell and his major-generals, David utilised "the captains of the host" as a kind of ministry of public worship; they joined with him in organising the orchestra and choir for the services of the sanctuary[2]: probably Napoleon and his marshals would have had no hesitation in selecting anthems for Notre Dame if the idea had occurred to them. David also consulted his captains,[3] and not the priests, about bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. When he gathered the great assembly to make his final arrangements for the building of the Temple, the princes and captains, the rulers and mighty men, are mentioned, but no priests.[4] And, last, all the congregation apparently anoint[5] Zadok to be priest. The chronicler was evidently a pronounced Erastian.[6] David is no mere nominal head of the Church; he takes the initiative in all important matters, and receives the Divine commands either directly or through his prophets Nathan and Gad. Now these prophets are not ecclesiastical authorities; they have nothing to do with the priesthood, and do not correspond to the officials of an organised Church. They are rather the domestic chaplains or confessors of the king, differing from modern chaplains and confessors in having no ecclesiastical superiors. They were

[1] 1 Sam. xxiii. 9–13; xxx. 7, 8. [2] xxv. 1, 2. [3] xiii. 1. [4] xxviii. 1. [5] xxix. 22. [6] But cf. 2 Chr. xxvi.

not responsible to the bishop of any diocese or the general of any order; they did not manipulate the royal conscience in the interests of any party in the Church; they served God and the king, and had no other masters. They did not beard David before his people, as Ambrose confronted Theodosius or as Chrysostom rated Eudoxia; they delivered their message to David in private, and on occasion he communicated it to the people.[1] The king's spiritual dignity is rather enhanced than otherwise by this reception of prophetic messages specially delivered to himself. There is another aspect of the royal supremacy in religion. In this particular instance its object is largely the exaltation of David; to arrange for public worship is the most honourable function of the ideal king. At the same time the care of the sanctuary is his most sacred duty, and is assigned to him that it may be punctually and worthily discharged. State establishment of the Church is combined with a very thorough control of the Church by the state.

We see then that the monarchy rested on Divine and national election, and was guided by the will of God and of the people. Indeed, in bringing up the Ark[2] the consent of the people is the only recorded indication of the will of God. "Vox populi vox Dei." The king and his government are supreme alike over the state and the sanctuary, and are entrusted with the charge of providing for public worship. Let us try to express the modern equivalents of these principles. Civil government is of Divine origin, and should obtain the consent of the people; it should be carried on according to the will of God, freely accepted by the

[1] Cf. xvii. 4–15 and xxviii. 2–10. [2] xiii. 1–14.

nation. The civil authority is supreme both in Church and state, and is responsible for the maintenance of public worship.

One at least of these principles is so widely accepted that it is quite independent of any Scriptural sanction from Chronicles. The consent of the people has long been accepted as an essential condition of any stable government. The sanctity of civil government and the sacredness of its responsibilities are coming to be recognised, at present perhaps rather in theory than in practice. We have not yet fully realised how the truth underlying the doctrine of the Divine right of kings applies to modern conditions. Formerly the king was the representative of the state, or even the state itself; that is to say, the king directly or indirectly maintained social order, and provided for the security of life and property. The Divine appointment and authority of the king expressed the sanctity of law and order as the essential conditions of moral and spiritual progress. The king is no longer the state. His Divine right, however, belongs to him, not as a person or as a member of a family, but as the embodiment of the state, the champion of social order against anarchy. The "Divinity that doth hedge a king" is now shared by the sovereign with all the various departments of government. The state—that is to say, the community organised for the common good and for mutual help—is now to be recognised as of Divine appointment and as wielding a Divine authority. "The Lord has turned the kingdom to" the people.

This revolution is so tremendous that it would not be safe to apply to the modern state the remaining principles of the chronicler. Before we could do so

we should need to enter into a discussion which would be out of place here, even if we had space for it.

In one point the new democracies agree with the chronicler: they are not inclined to submit secular affairs to the domination of ecclesiastical officials.

The questions of the supremacy of the state over the Church and of the state establishment of the Church involve larger and more complicated issues than existed in the mind or experience of the chronicler. But his picture of the ideal king suggests one idea that is in harmony with some modern aspirations. In Chronicles the king, as the representative of the state, is the special agent in providing for the highest spiritual needs of the people. May we venture to hope that out of the moral consciousness of a nation united in mutual sympathy and service there may arise a new enthusiasm to obey and worship God? Human cruelty is the greatest stumbling-block to belief and fellowship; when the state has somewhat mitigated the misery of "man's inhumanity to man," faith in God will be easier.

CHAPTER V

SOLOMON

THE chronicler's history of Solomon is constructed on the same principles as that of David, and for similar reasons. The builder of the first Temple commanded the grateful reverence of a community whose national and religious life centred in the second Temple. While the Davidic king became the symbol of the hope of Israel, the Jews could not forget that this symbol derived much of its significance from the widespread dominion and royal magnificence of Solomon. The chronicler, indeed, attributes great splendour to the court of David, and ascribes to him a lion's share in the Temple itself. He provided his successor with treasure and materials and even the complete plans, so that on the principle, "Qui facit per alium, facit per se," David might have been credited with the actual building. Solomon was almost in the position of a modern engineer who puts together a steamer that has been built in sections. But, with all these limitations, the clear and obvious fact remained that Solomon actually built and dedicated the Temple. Moreover, the memory of his wealth and grandeur kept a firm hold on the popular imagination; and these conspicuous blessings were received as certain tokens of the favour of Jehovah.

Solomon's fame, however, was threefold: he was not only the Divinely appointed builder of the Temple and, by the same Divine grace, the richest and most powerful king of Israel: he had also received from Jehovah the gift of "wisdom and knowledge." In his royal splendour and his sacred buildings he only differed in degree from other kings; but in his wisdom he stood alone, not only without equal, but almost without competitor. Herein he was under no obligation to his father, and the glory of Solomon could not be diminished by representing that he had been anticipated by David. Hence the name of Solomon came to symbolise Hebrew learning and philosophy.

In religious significance, however, Solomon cannot rank with David. The dynasty of Judah could have only one representative, and the founder and eponym of the royal house was the most important figure for the subsequent theology. The interest that later generations felt in Solomon lay apart from the main line of Jewish orthodoxy, and he is never mentioned by the prophets.[1]

Moreover, the darker aspects of Solomon's reign made more impression upon succeeding generations than even David's sins and misfortunes. Occasional lapses into vice and cruelty might be forgiven or even forgotten; but the systematic oppression of Solomon rankled for long generations in the hearts of the people, and the prophets always remembered his wanton idolatry. His memory was further discredited by the disasters which marked the close of his own reign and the beginning of Rehoboam's. Centuries later these

[1] The casual reference in Jer. lii. 20 is only an apparent exception. The passage is really historical, and not prophetic.

feelings still prevailed. The prophets who adapted the Mosaic law for the closing period of the monarchy exhort the king to take warning by Solomon, and to multiply neither horses, nor wives, nor gold and silver.[1]

But as time went on Judah fell into growing poverty and distress, which came to a head in the Captivity, and were renewed with the Restoration. The Jews were willing to forget Solomon's faults in order that they might indulge in fond recollections of the material prosperity of his reign. Their experience of the culture of Babylon led them to feel greater interest and pride in his wisdom, and the figure of Solomon began to assume a mysterious grandeur, which has since become the nucleus for Jewish and Mohammedan legends. The chief monument of his fame in Jewish literature is the book of Proverbs, but his growing reputation is shown by the numerous Biblical and apocryphal works ascribed to him. His name was no doubt attached to Canticles because of a feature in his character which the chronicler ignores. His supposed authorship of Ecclesiastes and of the Wisdom of Solomon testifies to the fame of his wisdom, while the titles of the "Psalms of Solomon" and even of some canonical psalms credit him with spiritual feeling and poetic power.[2]

When the Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach proposes to "praise famous men," it dwells upon Solomon's temple and his wealth, and especially upon his wisdom; but it does not forget his failings.[3] Josephus celebrates his glory at great length. The New Testament has comparatively few notices of Solomon; but these include

[1] Deut. xvii. 16, 17; cf. 2 Chron. i. 14–17 and 1 Kings xi. 3–8.

[2] Psalms lxxii. and cxxvii. are attributed to him, the latter, however, only in the Hebrew Bible.

[3] Ecclus. xlvii. 12–21.

references to his wisdom,[1] his splendour,[2] and his temple.[3] The Koran, however, far surpasses the New Testament in its interest in Solomon; and his name and his seal play a leading part in Jewish and Arabian magic. The bulk of this literature is later than the chronicler, but the renewed interest in the glory of Solomon must have begun before his time. Perhaps, by connecting the building of the Temple as far as possible with David, the chronicler marks his sense of Solomon's unworthiness. On the other hand, there were many reasons why he should welcome the aid of popular sentiment to enable him to include Solomon among the ideal Hebrew kings. After all, Solomon had built and dedicated the Temple; he was the "pious founder," and the beneficiaries of the foundation would wish to make the most of his piety. "Jehovah" had "magnified Solomon exceedingly in the sight of all Israel, and bestowed upon him such royal majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel."[4] King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom; and all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."[5] The chronicler would naturally wish to set forth the better side of Solomon's character as an ideal of royal wisdom and splendour, devoted to the service of the sanctuary. Let us briefly compare Chronicles and Kings to see how he accomplished his purpose.

The structure of the narrative in Kings rendered the task comparatively easy: it could be accomplished by removing the opening-and closing sections and making

[1] Matt. xii. 42.
[2] Matt. vi. 29.
[3] Acts vii. 47.
[4] 1 Chron. xxix. 25.
[5] 2 Chron. ix. 22, 23.

a few minor changes in the intermediate portion. The opening section is the sequel to the conclusion of David's reign; the chronicler omitted this conclusion, and therefore also its sequel. But the contents of this section were objectionable in themselves. Solomon's admirers willingly forget that his reign was inaugurated by the execution of Shimei, of his brother Adonijah, and of his father's faithful minister Joab, and by the deposition of the high-priest Abiathar. The chronicler narrates with evident approval the strong measures of Ezra and Nehemiah against foreign marriages, and he is therefore not anxious to remind his readers that Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. He does not, however, carry out his plan consistently. Elsewhere he wishes to emphasise the sanctity of the Ark and tells us that "Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David unto the house that he had built for her, for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel, because the places are holy whereunto the ark of the Lord hath come."[1]

In Kings the history of Solomon closes with a long account of his numerous wives and concubines, his idolatry and consequent misfortunes. All this is omitted by the chronicler; but later on, with his usual inconsistency, he allows Nehemiah to point the moral of a tale he has left untold: "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things? . . . Even him did strange women cause to sin."[2] In the intervening section he omits the famous judgment of Solomon, probably on account of the character of the women concerned. He introduces sundry changes which naturally follow from his belief that the Levitical law was then

[1] 2 Chron. viii. 11. [2] Neh. xiii. 26.

in force.[1] His feeling for the dignity of the chosen people and their king comes out rather curiously in two minor alterations. Both authorities agree in telling us that Solomon had recourse to forced labour for his building operations; in fact, after the usual Eastern fashion from the Pyramids down to the Suez Canal, Solomon's temple and palaces were built by the *corvée*. According to the oldest narrative, he "raised a levy out of all Israel."[2] This suggests that forced labour was exacted from the Israelites themselves, and it would help to account for Jeroboam's successful rebellion. The chronicler omits this statement as open to an interpretation derogatory to the dignity of the chosen people, and not only inserts a later explanation which he found in the book of Kings, but also another express statement that Solomon raised his levy of the "strangers that were in the land of Israel."[3] These statements may have been partly suggested by the existence of a class of Temple slaves called Solomon's servants.

The other instance relates to Solomon's alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre. In the book of Kings we are told that "Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee."[4] There were indeed redeeming features connected with the transaction; the cities were not a very valuable possession for Hiram: "they pleased him not"; yet he "sent to the king six score talents of gold." However, it seemed incredible to the chronicler that the most powerful and wealthy of the kings of

[1] Such changes occur throughout, and need not be further noticed unless some special interest attaches to them.

[2] 1 Kings v. 13; ix. 22, which seems to contradict this, is an editorial note.

[3] 2 Chron. ii. 2, 17, 18; viii. 7–10.

[4] 1 Kings ix. 11, 12.

Israel should either cede or sell any portion of Jehovah's inheritance. He emends the text of his authority so as to convert it into a casual reference to certain cities which Hiram had given to Solomon.[1]

We will now reproduce the story of Solomon as given by the chronicler. Solomon was the youngest of four sons born to David at Jerusalem by Bath-shua, the daughter of Ammiel. Besides these three brothers, he had at least six other elder brothers. As in the cases of Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David himself, the birthright fell to a younger son. In the prophetic utterance which foretold his birth, he was designated to succeed to his father's throne and to build the Temple. At the great assembly which closed his father's reign he received instructions as to the plans and services of the Temple,[2] and was exhorted to discharge his duties faithfully. He was declared king according to the Divine choice, freely accepted by David and ratified by popular acclamation. At David's death no one disputed his succession to the throne: "All Israel obeyed him; and all the princes and the mighty men and all the sons likewise of King David submitted themselves unto Solomon the king."[3]

His first act after his accession was to sacrifice before the brazen altar of the ancient Tabernacle at Gibeon. That night God appeared unto him "and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon chose wisdom and knowledge to qualify him for the arduous task of government. Having thus "sought first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," all other things—"riches, wealth, and honour"—were added unto him.[4]

He returned to Jerusalem, gathered a great array of

[1] 2 Chron. viii. 1, 2, R.V.
[2] 1 Chron. xxii. 9.
[3] 1 Chron. xxix. 23, 24.
[4] 2 Chron. i. 7–13.

chariots and horses by means of traffic with Egypt, and accumulated great wealth, so that silver, and gold, and cedars became abundant at Jerusalem.[1]

He next proceeded with the building of the Temple, collected workmen, obtained timber from Lebanon and an artificer from Tyre. The Temple was duly erected and dedicated, the king taking the chief and most conspicuous part in all the proceedings. Special reference, however, is made to the presence of the priests and Levites at the dedication. On this occasion the ministry of the sanctuary was not confined to the course whose turn it was to officiate, but "all the priests that were present had sanctified themselves and did not keep their courses; also the Levites, which were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brethren, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, and psalteries, and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them a hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets."[2]

Solomon's dedication prayer concludes with special petitions for the priests, the saints, and the king: "Now therefore arise, O Jehovah Elohim, into Thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of Thy strength; let Thy priests, O Jehovah Elohim, be clothed with salvation, and let Thy saints rejoice in goodness. O Jehovah Elohim, turn not away the face of Thine anointed; remember the mercies of David Thy servant."[3]

When David sacrificed at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, the place had been indicated as the site of the future Temple by the descent of fire from heaven; and now, in token that the mercy shown to

[1] 2 Chron. i. 14–17. [2] v. 11, 12, peculiar to Chronicles.
[3] vi. 41, 42, peculiar to Chronicles, apparently based on Psalm cxxxii. 8–10.

David should be continued to Solomon, the fire again fell from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Jehovah "filled the house of Jehovah,"[1] as it had done earlier in the day, when the Ark was brought into the Temple. Solomon concluded the opening ceremonies by a great festival: for eight days the Feast of Tabernacles was observed according to the Levitical law, and seven days more were specially devoted to a dedication feast.[2]

Afterwards Jehovah appeared again to Solomon, as He had before at Gibeon, and told him that this prayer was accepted. Taking up the several petitions that the king had offered, He promised, "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I send pestilence among My people; if My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now Mine eyes shall be open, and Mine ears attent, unto the prayer that is made in this place." Thus Jehovah, in His gracious condescension, adopts Solomon's own words[3] to express His answer to the prayer. He allows Solomon to dictate the terms of the agreement, and merely appends His signature and seal.

Besides the Temple, Solomon built palaces for himself and his wife, and fortified many cities, among the rest Hamath-zobah, formerly allied to David.[4] He also organised the people for civil and military purposes.

[1] 1 Chron. xxi. 26; 2 Chron. vii. 1–3, both peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] vii. 8–10, mostly peculiar to Chronicles. The text in 1 Kings viii. 65 has been interpolated from Chronicles.

[3] vii. 13–15, peculiar to Chronicles.

[4] viii. 3, 4, peculiar to Chronicles. Hamath is apparently referred to as a possession of Judah in 2 Kings xiv. 28.

As far as the account of his reign is concerned, the Solomon of Chronicles appears as "the husband of one wife"; and that wife is the daughter of Pharaoh. A second, however, is mentioned later on as the mother of Rehoboam; she too was a "strange woman," an Ammonitess, Naamah by name.

Meanwhile Solomon was careful to maintain all the sacrifices and festivals ordained in the Levitical law, and all the musical and other arrangements for the sanctuary commanded by David, the man of God.[1]

We read next of his commerce by sea and land, his great wealth and wisdom, and the romantic visit of the queen of Sheba.[2]

And so the story of Solomon closes with this picture of royal state,—

> "The wealth of Ormus and of Ind,
> Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
> Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold."

Wealth was combined with imperial power and Divine wisdom. Here, as in the case of Plato's own pupils Dionysius and Dion of Syracuse, Plato's dream came true; the prince was a philosopher, and the philosopher a prince.

At first sight it seems as if this marriage of authority and wisdom had happier issue at Jerusalem than at Syracuse. Solomon's history closes as brilliantly as David's, and Solomon was subject to no Satanic possession and brought no pestilence upon Israel. But testimonials are chiefly significant in what they omit; and when we compare the conclusions of the histories of David and Solomon, we note suggestive differences.

[1] viii. 12–16, peculiar in this form to Chronicles, but based upon 1 Kings ix. 25.

[2] ix., as in 1 Kings x. 1–13.

Solomon's life does not close with any scene in which his people and his heir assemble to do him honour and to receive his last injunctions. There are no "last words" of the wise king; and it is not said of him that "he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour." "Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father; and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead"[1]: that is all. When the chronicler, the professed panegyrist of the house of David, brings his narrative of this great reign to so lame and impotent a conclusion, he really implies as severe a condemnation upon Solomon as the book of Kings does by its narrative of his sins.

Thus the Solomon of Chronicles shows the same piety and devotion to the Temple and its ritual which were shown by his father. His prayer at the dedication of the Temple is parallel to similar utterances of David. Instead of being a general and a soldier, he is a scholar and a philosopher. He succeeded to the administrative abilities of his father; and his prayer displays a deep interest in the welfare of his subjects. His record—in Chronicles—is even more faultless than that of David. And yet the careful student with nothing but Chronicles, even without Ezra and Nehemiah, might somehow get the impression that the story of Solomon, like that of Cambuscan, had been "left half told." In addition to the points suggested by a comparison with the history of David, there is a certain abruptness about its conclusion. The last fact noted of Solomon, before the formal statistics about "the rest of his acts" and the years of his reign, is that horses were brought for him "out of Egypt and out of all lands." Else-

[1] ix. 31.

where the chronicler's use of his materials shows a feeling for dramatic effect. We should not have expected him to close the history of a great reign by a reference to the king's trade in horses.[1]

Perhaps we are apt to read into Chronicles what we know from the book of Kings; yet surely this abrupt conclusion would have raised a suspicion that there were omissions, that facts had been suppressed because they could not bear the light. Upon the splendid figure of the great king, with his wealth and wisdom, his piety and devotion, rests the vague shadow of unnamed sins and unrecorded misfortunes. A suggestion of unhallowed mystery attaches itself to the name of the builder of the Temple, and Solomon is already on the way to become the Master of the Genii and the chief of magicians.[2]

[1] ix. 28.

[2] It is not suggested that the chronicler intended to convey this impression, or that it would be felt by most of his readers.

CHAPTER VI

SOLOMON (continued)

WHEN we turn to consider the spiritual significance of this ideal picture of the history and character of Solomon, we are confronted by a difficulty that attends the exposition of any ideal history. An author's ideal of kingship in the early stages of literature is usually as much one and indivisible as his ideal of priesthood, of the office of the prophet, and of the wicked king. His authorities may record different incidents in connection with each individual; but he emphasises those which correspond with his ideal, or even anticipates the higher criticism by constructing incidents which seem required by the character and circumstances of his heroes. On the other hand, where the priest, or the prophet, or the king departs from the ideal, the incidents are minimised or passed over in silence. There will still be a certain variety because different individuals may present different elements of the ideal, and the chronicler does not insist on each of his good kings possessing all the characteristics of royal perfection. Still the tendency of the process is to make all the good kings alike. It would be monotonous to take each of them separately and deduce the lessons taught by their virtues, because the chronicler's intention is that

they shall all teach the same lessons by the same kind of behaviour described from the same point of view. David has a unique position, and has to be taken by himself; but in considering the features that must be added to the picture of David in order to complete the picture of the good king, it is convenient to group Solomon with the reforming kings of Judah. We shall therefore defer for more consecutive treatment the chronicler's account of their general characters and careers. Here we shall merely gather up the suggestions of the different narratives as to the chronicler's ideal Hebrew king.

The leading points have already been indicated from the chronicler's history of David. The first and most indispensable feature is devotion to the temple at Jerusalem and the ritual of the Pentateuch. This has been abundantly illustrated from the account of Solomon. Taking the reforming kings in their order :—

Asa removed the high places which were rivals of the Temple,[1] renewed the altar of Jehovah, gathered the people together for a great sacrifice,[2] and made munificent donations to the Temple treasury.[3]

Similarly Jehoshaphat took away the high places,[4] and sent out a commission to teach the Law.[5]

Joash repaired the Temple[6]; but, curiously enough, though Jehoram had restored the high places[7] and Joash was acting under the direction of the high-priest

[1] xiv. 3, 5, contradicting 1 Kings xv. 14 and apparently 2 Chron. xv. 17.

[2] xv. 8–14, peculiar to Chronicles.

[3] xv. 18, 19.

[4] xvii. 6 contradicts 1 Kings xxii. 43 and 2 Chron. xx. 33.

[5] xvii. 7–9, peculiar to Chronicles.

[6] xxiv. 1–14.

[7] xxi. 11, peculiar to Chronicles.

Jehoiada, it is not stated that the high places were done away with. This is one of the chronicler's rather numerous oversights. Perhaps, however, he expected that so obvious a reform would be taken for granted.

Amaziah was careful to observe "the law in the book of Moses" that "the children should not die for the fathers,"[1] but Amaziah soon turned away from following Jehovah. This is perhaps the reason why in his case also nothing is said about doing away with the high places.

Hezekiah had a special opportunity of showing his devotion to the Temple and the Law. The Temple had been polluted and closed by Ahaz, and its services discontinued. Hezekiah purified the Temple, reinstated the priests and Levites, and renewed the services; he made arrangements for the payment of the Temple revenues according to the provisions of the Levitical law, and took away the high places. He also held a reopening festival and a passover with numerous sacrifices.[2]

Manasseh's repentance is indicated by the restoration of the Temple ritual.[3]

Josiah took away the high places, repaired the Temple, made the people enter into a covenant to observe the rediscovered Law, and, like Hezekiah, held a great passover.[4]

The reforming kings, like David and Solomon, are specially interested in the music of the Temple and in

[1] xxv. 4.

[2] 2 Chron. xxviii. 24–xxxi., mostly peculiar to Chronicles; but compare 2 Kings xviii. 4–7, which mentions the taking away of the high places.

[3] xxxiii. 16.

[4] xxxiv.; xxxv.

all the arrangements that have to do with the porters and doorkeepers and other classes of Levites. Their enthusiasm for the exclusive rights of the one Temple symbolises their loyalty to the one God, Jehovah, and their hatred of idolatry.

Zeal for Jehovah and His temple is still combined with uncompromising assertion of the royal supremacy in matters of religion. The king, and not the priest, is the highest spiritual authority in the nation. Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah control the arrangements for public worship as completely as Moses or David. Solomon receives Divine communications without the intervention of either priest or prophet; he himself offers the great dedication prayer, and when he makes an end of praying, fire comes down from heaven. Under Hezekiah the civil authorities decide when the passover shall be observed: "For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the passover in the second month."[1] The great reforms of Josiah are throughout initiated and controlled by the king. He himself goes up to the Temple and reads in the ears of the people all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Jehovah. The chronicler still adheres to the primitive idea of the theocracy, according to which the chief, or judge, or king is the representative of Jehovah.

The title to the crown rests throughout on the grace of God and the will of the people. In Judah, however, the principle of hereditary succession prevails throughout. Athaliah is not really an exception: she reigned as the widow of a Davidic king. The double election

[1] xxx. 2.

of David by Jehovah and by Israel carried with it the election of his dynasty. The permanent rule of the house of David was secured by the Divine promise to its founder. Yet the title is not allowed to rest on mere hereditary right. Divine choice and popular recognition are recorded in the case of Solomon and other kings. "All Israel came to Shechem to make Rehoboam king," and yet revolted from him when he refused to accept their conditions; but the obstinacy which caused the disruption "was brought about of God, that Jehovah might establish His word which He spake by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite."

Ahaziah, Joash, Uzziah, Josiah, Jehoahaz, were all set upon the throne by the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.[1] After Solomon the Divine appointment of kings is not expressly mentioned; Jehovah's control over the tenure of the throne is chiefly shown by the removal of unworthy occupants.

It is interesting to note that the chronicler does not hesitate to record that of the last three sovereigns of Judah two were appointed by foreign kings: Jehoiakim was the nominee of Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt; and the last king of all, Zedekiah, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. In like manner, the Herods, the last rulers of the restored kingdom of Judah, were the nominees of the Roman emperors. Such nominations forcibly illustrate the degradations and ruin of the theocratic monarchy. But yet, according to the teaching of the prophets, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar were tools in the hand of Jehovah; and their nomination was still an indirect Divine appointment. In the chronicler's time, however, Judah was

[1] xxii. 1; xxiii. 1–15; xxvi. 1; xxxiii. 25; xxxvi. 1.

thoroughly accustomed to receive her governors from a Persian or Greek king; and Jewish readers would not be scandalised by a similar state of affairs in the closing years of the earlier kingdom.

Thus the reforming kings illustrate the ideal kingship set forth in the history of David and Solomon: the royal authority originates in, and is controlled by, the will of God and the consent of the people; the king's highest duty is the maintenance of the worship of Jehovah; but the king and people are supreme both in Church and state.

The personal character of the good kings is also very similar to that of David and Solomon. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah are men of spiritual feeling as well as careful observers of correct ritual. None of the good kings, with the exception of Joash and Josiah, are unsuccessful in war; and good reasons are given for the exceptions. They all display administrative ability by their buildings, the organisation of the Temple services and the army, and the arrangements for the collection of the revenue, especially the dues of the priests and Levites.

There is nothing, however, to indicate that the personal charm of David's character was inherited by his descendants; but when biography is made merely a means of edification, it often loses those touches of nature which make the whole world kin, and are capable of exciting either admiration or disgust.

The later narrative affords another illustration of the absence of any sentiment of humanity towards enemies. As in the case of David, the chronicler records the cruelty of a good king as if it were quite consistent with loyalty to Jehovah. Before he turned away from following Jehovah, Amaziah defeated the Edomites and

smote ten thousand of them. Others were treated like some of the Malagasy martyrs: "And other ten thousand did the children of Judah carry away alive, and brought them unto the top of the rock, and cast them down from the top of the rock, that they all were broken in pieces."[1] In this case, however, the chronicler is not simply reproducing Kings: he has taken the trouble to supplement his main authority from some other source, probably local tradition. His insertion of this verse is another testimony to the undying hatred of Israel for Edom.

But in one respect the reforming kings are sharply distinguished from David and Solomon. The record of their lives is by no means blameless, and their sins are visited by condign chastisement. They all, with the single exception of Jotham, come to a bad end. Asa consulted physicians, and was punished by being allowed to die of a painful disease.[2] The last event of Jehoshaphat's life was the ruin of the navy, which he had built in unholy alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did very wickedly.[3] Joash murdered the prophet Zechariah, the son of the high-priest Jehoiada; his great host was routed by a small company of Syrians, and Joash himself was assassinated by his servants.[4] Amaziah turned away from following Jehovah, and "brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them." He was accordingly defeated by Joash, king of Israel, and assassinated by his own people.[5] Uzziah insisted on exercising the priestly function of burning incense to Jehovah, and so died a leper.[6] "Even Hezekiah ren-

[1] xxv. 11. [2] xvi. 12. [3] xx. 37. [4] xxiv 20–27. [5] xxv. 14–27. [6] xxvi. 16–23.

dered not again according to the benefit done unto him, for his heart was lifted up in the business of ambassadors of the princes of Babylon; therefore there was wrath upon him and upon Judah and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Jehovah came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah." But yet the last days of Hezekiah were clouded by the thought that he was leaving the punishment of his sin as a legacy to Judah and the house of David.[1] Josiah refused to heed the warning sent to him by God through the king of Egypt: "He hearkened not unto the words of Neco from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo"; and so Josiah died like Ahab: he was wounded by the archers, carried out of the battle in his chariot, and died at Jerusalem.[2]

The melancholy record of the misfortunes of the good kings in their closing years is also found in the book of Kings. There too Asa in his old age was diseased in his feet, Jehoshaphat's ships were wrecked, Joash and Amaziah were assassinated, Uzziah became a leper, Hezekiah was rebuked for his pride, and Josiah slain at Megiddo. But, except in the case of Hezekiah, the book of Kings says nothing about the sins which, according to Chronicles, occasioned these sufferings and catastrophes. The narrative in the book of Kings carries upon the face of it the lesson that piety is not usually rewarded with unbroken prosperity, and that a pious career does not necessarily ensure a happy deathbed. The significance of the chronicler's additions will be considered elsewhere;

[1] xxxii. 25–33. [2] xxxv. 20–27.

what concerns us here is his departure from the principles he observed in dealing with the lives of David and Solomon. They also sinned and suffered; but the chronicler omits their sins and sufferings, especially in the case of Solomon. Why does he pursue an opposite course with other good kings and blacken their characters by perpetuating the memory of sins not mentioned in the book of Kings, instead of confining his record to the happier incidents of their career? Many considerations may have influenced him. The violent deaths of Joash, Amaziah, and Josiah could neither be ignored nor explained away. Hezekiah's sin and repentance are closely parallel to David's in the matter of the census. Although Asa's disease, Jehoshaphat's alliance with Israel, and Uzziah's leprosy might easily have been omitted, yet, if some reformers must be allowed to remain imperfect, there was no imperative necessity to ignore the infirmities of the rest. The great advantage of the course pursued by the chronicler consisted in bringing out a clearly defined contrast between David and Solomon on the one hand and the reforming kings on the other. The piety of the latter is conformed to the chronicler's ideal; but the glory and devotion of the former are enhanced by the crimes and humiliation of the best of their successors. Hezekiah, doubtless, is not more culpable than David, but David's pride was the first of a series of events which terminated in the building of the Temple; while the uplifting of Hezekiah's heart was a precursor of its destruction. Besides, Hezekiah ought to have profited by David's experience.

By developing this contrast, the chronicler renders the position of David and Solomon even more unique, illustrious, and full of religious significance.

Thus as illustrations of ideal kingship the accounts of the good kings of Judah are altogether subordinate to the history of David and Solomon. While these kings of Judah remain loyal to Jehovah, they further illustrate the virtues of their great predecessors by showing how these virtues might have been exercised under different circumstances: how David would have dealt with an Ethiopian invasion and what Solomon would have done if he had found the Temple desecrated and its services stopped. But no essential feature is added to the earlier pictures.

The lapses of kings who began to walk in the law of the Lord and then fell away serve as foils to the undimmed glory of David and Solomon. Abrupt transitions within the limits of the individual lives of Asa, Joash, and Amaziah bring out the contrast between piety and apostacy with startling, dramatic effect.

We return from this brief survey to consider the significance of the life of Solomon according to Chronicles. Its relation to the life of David is summed up in the name Solomon, the Prince of peace. David is the ideal king, winning by force of arms for Israel empire and victory, security at home and tribute from abroad. Utterly subdued by his prowess, the natural enemies of Israel no longer venture to disturb her tranquillity. His successor inherits wide dominion, immense wealth, and assured peace. Solomon, the Prince of peace, is the ideal king, administering a great inheritance for the glory of Jehovah and His temple. His history in Chronicles is one of unbroken calm. He has a great army and many strong fortresses, but he never has occasion to use them. He implores Jehovah to be merciful to Israel when they suffer from

the horrors of war; but he is interceding, not for his own subjects, but for future generations. In his time—

"No war or battle's sound
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hookèd chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armèd throng."[1]

Perhaps, to use a paradox, the greatest proof of Solomon's wisdom was that he asked for wisdom. He realised at the outset of his career that a wide dominion is more easily won than governed, that to use great wealth honourably requires more skill and character than are needed to amass it. To-day the world can boast half a dozen empires surpassing not merely Israel, but even Rome, in extent of dominion; the aggregate wealth of the world is far beyond the wildest dreams of the chronicler: but still the people perish for lack of knowledge. The physical and moral foulness of modern cities taints all the culture and tarnishes all the splendour of our civilisation; classes and trades, employers and employed, maim and crush one another in blind struggles to work out a selfish salvation; newly devised organisations move their unwieldy masses—

". . . like dragons of the prime
That tare each other."

They have a giant's strength, and use it like a giant. Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers; and the world waits for the reign of the Prince of peace who is not only the wise king, but the incarnate wisdom of God.

Thus one striking suggestion of the chronicler's

[1] Milton, Hymn to the Nativity.

history of Solomon is the special need of wisdom and Divine guidance for the administration of a great and prosperous empire.

Too much stress, however, must not be laid on the twofold personality of the ideal king. This feature is adopted from the history, and does not express any opinion of the chronicler that the characteristic gifts of David and Solomon could not be combined in a single individual. Many great generals have also been successful administrators. Before Julius Cæsar was assassinated he had already shown his capacity to restore order and tranquillity to the Roman world; Alexander's plans for the civil government of his conquests were as far-reaching as his warlike ambition; Diocletian reorganised the empire which his sword had re-established; Cromwell's schemes of reform showed an almost prophetic insight into the future needs of the English people; the glory of Napoleon's victories is a doubtful legacy to France compared with the solid benefits of his internal reforms.

But even these instances, which illustrate the union of military genius and administrative ability, remind us that the assignment of success in war to one king and a reign of peace to the next is, after all, typical. The limits of human life narrow its possibilities. Cæsar's work had to be completed by Augustus; the great schemes of Alexander and Cromwell fell to the ground because no one arose to play Solomon to their David.

The chronicler has specially emphasised the indebtedness of Solomon to David. According to his narrative, the great achievement of Solomon's reign, the building of the Temple, has been rendered possible by David's preparations. Quite apart from plans and

materials, the chronicler's view of the credit due to David in this matter is only a reasonable recognition of service rendered to the religion of Israel. Whoever provided the timber and stone, the silver and gold, for the Temple, David won for Jehovah the land and the city that were the outer courts of the sanctuary, and roused the national spirit that gave to Zion its most solemn consecration. Solomon's temple was alike the symbol of David's achievements and the coping-stone of his work.

By compelling our attention to the dependence of the Prince of Peace upon the man who "had shed much blood," the chronicler admonishes us against forgetting the price that has been paid for liberty and culture. The splendid courtiers whose "apparel" specially pleased the feminine tastes of the queen of Sheba might feel all the contempt of the superior person for David's war-worn veterans. The latter probably were more at home in the "store cities" than at Jerusalem. But without the blood and toil of these rough soldiers Solomon would have had no opportunity to exchange riddles with his fair visitor and to dazzle her admiring eyes with the glories of his temple and palaces.

The blessings of peace are not likely to be preserved unless men still appreciate and cherish the stern virtues that flourish in troubled times. If our own times become troubled, and their serenity be invaded by fierce conflict, it will be ours to remember that the rugged life of "the hold in the wilderness" and the struggles with the Philistines may enable a later generation to build its temple to the Lord and to learn the answers to "hard questions."[1] Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon,

[1] 2 Chron. ix. 1.

remind us again how the Divine work is handed on from generation to generation: Moses leads Israel through the wilderness, but Joshua brings them into the Land of Promise; David collects the materials, but Solomon builds the Temple. The settlement in Palestine and the building of the Temple were only episodes in the working out of the "one increasing purpose," but one leader and one life-time did not suffice for either episode. We grow impatient of the scale upon which God works: we want it reduced to the limits of our human faculties and of our earthly lives; yet all history preaches patience. In our demand for Divine interventions whereby—

> ". . . sudden in a minute
> All is accomplished, and the work is done,"

we are very Esaus, eager to sell the birthright of the future for a mess of pottage to-day.

And the continuity of the Divine purpose is only realised through the continuity of human effort. We must indeed serve our own generation; but part of that service consists in providing that the next generation shall be trained to carry on the work, and that after David shall come Solomon—the Solomon of Chronicles, and not the Solomon of Kings—and that, if possible, Solomon shall not be succeeded by Rehoboam. As we attain this larger outlook, we shall be less tempted to employ doubtful means, which are supposed to be justified by their end; we shall be less enthusiastic for processes that bring "quick returns," but give very "small profits" in the long run. Christian workers are a little too fond of spiritual jerry-building, as if sites in the kingdom of heaven were let out on

ninety-nine-year leases; but God builds for eternity, and we are fellow-workers together with Him.

To complete the chronicler's picture of the ideal king, we have to add David's warlike prowess and Solomon's wisdom and splendour to the piety and graces common to both. The result is unique among the many pictures that have been drawn by historians, philosophers, and poets. It has a value of its own, because the chronicler's gifts in the way of history, philosophy, and poetry were entirely subordinated to his interest in theology; and most theologians have only been interested in the doctrine of the king when they could use it to gratify the vanity of a royal patron.

The full-length portrait in Chronicles contrasts curiously with the little vignette preserved in the book which bears the name of Solomon. There, in the oracle which King Lemuel's mother taught him, the king is simply admonished to avoid strange women and strong drink, to "judge righteously, and minister judgment to the poor and needy."[1]

To pass to more modern theology, the theory of the king that is implied in Chronicles has much in common with Wyclif's doctrine of dominion: they both recognise the sanctity of the royal power and its temporal supremacy, and they both hold that obedience to God is the condition of the continued exercise of legitimate rule. But the priest of Lutterworth was less ecclesiastical and more democratic than our Levite.

A more orthodox authority on the Protestant doctrine of the king would be the Thirty-nine Articles. These, however, deal with the subject somewhat slightly. As

[1] Prov. xxxi. 1–9.

far as they go, they are in harmony with the chronicler. They assert the unqualified supremacy of the king, both ecclesiastical and civil. Even "general councils may not be gathered together without the commandment and will of princes."[1] On the other hand, princes are not to imitate Uzziah in presuming to exercise the priestly function of offering incense: they are not to minister God's word or sacraments.

Outside theology the ideal of the king has been stated with greater fulness and freedom, but not many of the pictures drawn have much in common with the chronicler's David and Solomon. Machiavelli's prince and Bolingbroke's patriot king belong to a different world; moreover, their method is philosophical, and not historical: they state a theory rather than draw a picture. Tennyson's Arthur is, what he himself calls him, an "ideal knight" rather than an ideal king. Perhaps the best parallels to David are to be found in the Cyrus of the Greek historians and philosophers and the Alfred of English story. Alfred indeed combines many of the features both of David and Solomon: he secured English unity, and was the founder of English culture and literature; he had a keen interest in ecclesiastical affairs, great gifts of administration, and much personal attractiveness. Cyrus, again, specially illustrates what we may call the posthumous fortunes of David: his name stood for the ideal of kingship with both Greeks and Persians, and in the *Cyropædia* his life and character are made the basis of a picture of the ideal king.

Many points are of course common to almost all

[1] Articles XXI. and XXXVII.

such pictures; they portray the king as a capable and benevolent ruler and a man of high personal character. The distinctive characteristic of Chronicles is the stress laid on the piety of the king, his care for the honour of God and the spiritual welfare of his subjects. If the practical influence of this teaching has not been altogether beneficent, it is because men have too invariably connected spiritual profit with organisation, and ceremonies, and forms of words, sound or otherwise.

But to-day the doctrine of the state takes the place of the doctrine of the king. Instead of Cyropædias we have Utopias. We are asked sometimes to look back, not to an ideal king, but to an ideal commonwealth, to the age of the Antonines or to some happy century of English history when we are told that the human race or the English people were "most happy and prosperous"; oftener we are invited to contemplate an imaginary future. We may add to those already made one or two further applications of the chronicler's principles to the modern state. His method suggests that the perfect society will have the virtues of our actual life without its vices, and that the possibilities of the future are best divined from a careful study of the past. The devotion of his kings to the Temple symbolises the truth that the ideal state is impossible without recognition of a Divine presence and obedience to a Divine will.

CHAPTER VII

THE WICKED KINGS

2 CHRON. xxviii., etc.

THE type of the wicked king is not worked out with any fulness in Chronicles. There are wicked kings, but no one is raised to the "bad eminence" of an evil counterpart to David; there is no anti-David, so to speak, no prototype of antichrist. The story of Ahaz, for instance, is not given at the same length and with the same wealth of detail as that of David. The subject was not so congenial to the kindly heart of the chronicler. He was not imbued with the unhappy spirit of modern realism, which loves to dwell on all that is foul and ghastly in life and character; he lingered affectionately over his heroes, and contented himself with brief notices of his villains. In so doing he was largely following his main authority: the books of Samuel and Kings. There too the stories of David and Solomon, of Elijah and Elisha, are told much more fully than those of Jeroboam and Ahab.

But the mention of these names reminds us that the chronicler's limitation of his subject to the history of Judah excludes much of the material that might have been drawn from the earlier history for a picture of the wicked king. If it had been part of the chronicler's plan to tell the story of Ahab, he might

have been led to develop his material and moralise upon the king's career till the narrative assumed proportions that would have rivalled the history of David. Over against the great scene that closed David's life might have been set another summing up in one dramatic moment the guilt and ruin of Ahab. But these schismatic kings were "alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world."[1] The disobedient sons of the house of David were still children within the home, who might be rebuked and punished; but the Samaritan kings, as the chronicler might style them, were outcasts, left to the tender mercies of the dogs, and sorcerers, and murderers that were without the Holy City, Cains without any protecting mark upon their forehead.

Hence the wicked kings in Chronicles are of the house of David. Therefore the chronicler has a certain tenderness for them, partly for the sake of their great ancestor, partly because they are kings of Judah, partly because of the sanctity and religious significance of the Messianic dynasty. These kings are not Esaus, for whom there is no place of repentance. The chronicler is happy in being able to discover and record the conversion, as we should term it, of some kings whose reigns began in rebellion and apostacy. By a curious compensation, the kings who begin well end badly, and those who begin badly end well; they all tend to about the same average. We read of Rehoboam[2] that "when he humbled himself the wrath of the Lord turned from him, that he would not destroy him altogether; and, moreover, in Judah

[1] Eph. ii. 12.

[2] 2 Chron. xii. 12, peculiar to Chronicles.

there were good things found"; the wickedness of Abijah, which is plainly set forth in the book of Kings,[1] is ignored in Chronicles; Manasseh "humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers," and turned altogether from the error of his ways[2]; the unfavourable judgment on Jehoahaz recorded in the book of Kings, "And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his fathers had done,"[3] is omitted in Chronicles.

There remain seven wicked kings of whom nothing but evil is recorded: Jehoram, Ahaziah, Ahaz, Amon, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. Of these we may take Ahaz as the most typical instance. As in the cases of David and Solomon, we will first see how the chronicler has dealt with the material derived from the book of Kings; then we will give his account of the career of Ahaz; and finally, by a brief comparison of what is told of Ahaz with the history of the other wicked kings, we will try to construct the chronicler's idea of the wicked king and to deduce its lessons.

The importance of the additions made by the chronicler to the history in the book of Kings will appear later on. In his account of the attack made upon Ahaz by Rezin, king of Damascus, and Pekah, king of Israel, he emphasises the incidents most discreditable to Ahaz. The book of Kings simply states that the two allies "came up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him"[4]; Chronicles dwells upon the sufferings and losses inflicted on Judah by this invasion. The book of Kings might have conveyed the impression that the wicked king had been allowed to triumph over his enemies;

[1] 1 Kings xv. 3.
[2] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 11-20, peculiar to Chronicles.
[3] 2 Kings xxiii. 32.
[4] 2 Kings xvi. 5.

Chronicles guards against this dangerous error by detailing the disasters that Ahaz brought upon his country.

The book of Kings also contains an interesting account of alterations made by Ahaz in the Temple and its furniture. By his orders the high-priest Urijah made a new brazen altar for the Temple after the pattern of an altar that Ahaz had seen in Damascus. As Chronicles narrates the closing of the Temple by Ahaz, it naturally omits these previous alterations. Moreover, Urijah appears in the book of Isaiah as a friend of the prophet, and is referred to by him as a "faithful witness."[1] The chronicler would not wish to perplex his readers with the problem, How could the high-priest, whom Isaiah trusted as a faithful witness, become the agent of a wicked king, and construct an altar for Jehovah after a heathen pattern?

The chronicler's story of Ahaz runs thus. This wicked king had been preceded by three good kings: Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham. Amaziah indeed had turned away from following Jehovah at the end of his reign, but Uzziah had been zealous for Jehovah throughout, not wisely, but too well; and Jotham shares with Solomon the honour of a blameless record. Without counting Amaziah's reign, king and people had been loyal to Jehovah for sixty or seventy years. The court of the good kings would be the centre of piety and devotion. Ahaz, no doubt, had been carefully trained in obedience to the law of Jehovah, and had grown up in the atmosphere of true religion. Possibly he had known his grandfather Uzziah in the days of his power and glory; but at any rate, while Ahaz was

[1] Isa. viii. 2.

a child, Uzziah was living as a leper in his "several house," and Ahaz must have been familiar with this melancholy warning against presumptuous interference with the Divine ordinances of worship.

Ahaz was twenty years old when he came to the throne, so that he had time to profit by a complete education, and should scarcely have found opportunity to break away from its influence. His mother's name is not mentioned, so that we cannot say whether, as may have been the case with Rehoboam, some Ammonite woman led him astray from the God of his fathers. As far as we can learn from our author, Ahaz sinned against light and knowledge; with every opportunity and incentive to keep in the right path, he yet went astray.

This is a common feature in the careers of the wicked kings. It has often been remarked that the first great specialist on education failed utterly in the application of his theories to his own son. Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah were the most distinguished and the most virtuous of the reforming kings, yet Jehoshaphat was succeeded by Jehoram, who was almost as wicked as Ahaz; Hezekiah's son "Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, so that they did evil more than did the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the children of Israel";[1] Josiah's son and grandsons "did evil in the sight of the Lord."[2]

Many reasons may be suggested for this too familiar spectacle: the impious son of a godly father, the bad successor of a good king. Heirs-apparent have always been inclined to head an opposition to their fathers' policy, and sometimes on their accession they have

[1] 2 Chron. xxxiii. 9. [2] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 5, 8, 11.

reversed that policy. When the father himself has been a zealous reformer, the interests that have been harassed by reform are eager to encourage his successor in a retrograde policy; and reforming zeal is often tinged with an inconsiderate harshness that provokes the opposition of younger and brighter spirits. But, after all, this atavism in kings is chiefly an illustration of the slow growth of the higher nature in man. Practically each generation starts afresh with an unregenerate nature of its own, and often nature is too strong for education.

Moreover, a young king of Judah was subject to the evil influence of his northern neighbour. Judah was often politically subservient to Samaria, and politics and religion have always been very intimately associated. At the accession of Ahaz the throne of Samaria was filled by Pekah, whose twenty years' tenure of authority indicates ability and strength of character. It is not difficult to understand how Ahaz was led "to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel" and "to make molten images for the Baals."

Nothing is told us of the actual circumstances of these innovations. The new reign was probably inaugurated by the dismissal of Jotham's ministers and the appointment of the personal favourites of the new king. The restoration of old idolatrous cults would be a natural advertisement of a new departure in the government. So when the establishment of Christianity was a novelty in the empire, and men were not assured of its permanence, Julian's accession was accompanied by an apostacy to paganism; and later aspirants to the purple promised to follow his example. But the worship of Jehovah was not at once suppressed. He was not deposed from His throne as the

Divine King of Judah; He was only called upon to share His royal authority with the Baals of the neighbouring peoples.

But although the Temple services might still be performed, the king was mainly interested in introducing and observing a variety of heathen rites. The priesthood of the Temple saw their exclusive privileges disregarded and the rival sanctuaries of the high places and the sacred trees taken under royal patronage. But the king's apostacy was not confined to the milder forms of idolatry. His weak mind was irresistibly attracted by the morbid fascination of the cruel rites of Moloch: "He burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abomination of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel."

The king's devotions to his new gods were rudely interrupted. The insulted majesty of Jehovah was vindicated by two disastrous invasions. First, Ahaz was defeated by Rezin, king of Syria, who carried away a great multitude of captives to Damascus; the next enemy was one of those kings of Israel in whose idolatrous ways Ahaz had chosen to walk. The delicate flattery implied by Ahaz becoming Pekah's proselyte failed to conciliate that monarch. He too defeated the Jews with great slaughter. Amongst his warriors was a certain Zichri, whose achievements recalled the prowess of David's mighty men: he slew Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam, the ruler of the house, the Lord High Chamberlain, and Elkanah, that was next unto the king, the Prime Minister. With these notables, there perished in a single day a hundred and twenty thousand Jews, all of them valiant men. Their wives and children, to the number of two hundred

thousand, were carried captive to Samaria. All these misfortunes happened to Judah "because they had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers."

And yet Jehovah in wrath remembered mercy. The Israelite army approached Samaria with their endless train of miserable captives, women and children, ragged and barefoot, some even naked, filthy and footsore with forced marches, left hungry and thirsty after prisoners' scanty rations. Multiply a thousandfold the scenes depicted on Egyptian and Assyrian monuments, and you have the picture of this great slave caravan. The captives probably had no reason to fear the barbarities which the Assyrians loved to inflict upon their prisoners, but yet their prospects were sufficiently gloomy. Before them lay a life of drudgery and degradation in Samaria. The more wealthy might hope to be ransomed by their friends; others, again, might be sold to the Phœnician traders, to be carried by them to the great slave marts of Nineveh and Babylon or even oversea to Greece. But in a moment all was changed. "There was a prophet of Jehovah, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army and said unto them, Behold, because Jehovah, the God of your fathers, was wroth with Judah, He hath delivered them into your hand; and ye have slain them in a rage which hath reached up unto heaven. And now ye purpose to keep the children of Judah and of Jerusalem for male and female slaves; but are there not even with you trespasses of your own against Jehovah your God? Now hear me therefore, and send back the captives, for the fierce wrath of Jehovah is upon you."

Meanwhile "the princes and all the congregation of Samaria" were waiting to welcome their victorious

army, possibly in "the void place at the entering in of the gate of Samaria." Oded's words, at any rate, had been uttered in their presence. The army did not at once respond to the appeal; the two hundred thousand slaves were the most valuable part of their spoil, and they were not eager to make so great a sacrifice. But the princes made Oded's message their own. Four heads of the children of Ephraim are mentioned by name as the spokesmen of the "congregation," the king being apparently absent on some other warlike expedition. These four were Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai. Possibly among the children of Ephraim who dwelt in Jerusalem after the Return there were descendants of these men, from whom the chronicler obtained the particulars of this incident. The princes "stood up against them that came from the war," and forbade their bringing the captives into the city. They repeated and expanded the words of the prophet: "Ye purpose that which will bring upon us a trespass against Jehovah, to add unto our sins and to our trespass, for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel." The army were either convinced by the eloquence or overawed by the authority of the prophet and the princes: "They left the captives and the spoil before all the princes and the congregation." And the four princes "rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto their brethren; then they returned to Samaria."

Apart from incidental allusions, this is the last reference in Chronicles to the northern kingdom. The long history of division and hostility closes with this humane recognition of the brotherhood of Israel and Judah. The sun, so to speak, did not go down upon their wrath. But the king of Israel had no personal share in this gracious act. At the first it was Jeroboam that made Israel to sin; throughout the history the responsibility for the continued division would specially rest upon the kings, and at the last there is no sign of Pekah's repentance and no prospect of his pardon.

The various incidents of the invasions of Rezin and Pekah were alike a solemn warning and an impressive appeal to the apostate king of Judah. He had multiplied to himself gods of the nations round about, and yet had been left without an ally, at the mercy of a hostile confederation, against whom his new gods either could not or would not defend him. The wrath of Jehovah had brought upon Ahaz one crushing defeat after another, and yet the only mitigation of the sufferings of Judah had also been the work of Jehovah. The returning captives would tell Ahaz and his princes how in schismatic and idolatrous Samaria a prophet of Jehovah had stood forth to secure their release and obtain for them permission to return home. The princes and people of Samaria had hearkened to his message, and the two hundred thousand captives stood there as the monument of Jehovah's compassion and of the obedient piety of Israel. Sin was bound to bring punishment; and yet Jehovah waited to be gracious. Wherever there was room for mercy, He would show mercy. His wrath and His compassion had alike been displayed before Ahaz. Other gods could not protect their worshippers against Him; He only could deliver and restore His

people. He had not even waited for Ahaz to repent before He had given him proof of His willingness to forgive.[1]

Such Divine goodness was thrown away upon Ahaz; there was no token of repentance, no promise of amendment; and so Jehovah sent further judgments upon the king and his unhappy people. The Edomites came and smote Judah, and carried away captives; the Philistines also invaded the cities of the lowland and of the south of Judah, and took Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, Gimzo, and their dependent villages, and dwelt in them; and Jehovah brought Judah low because of Ahaz. And the king hardened his heart yet more against Jehovah, and cast away all restraint, and trespassed sore against Jehovah. Instead of submitting himself, he sought the aid of the kings of Assyria, only to receive another proof of the vanity of all earthly help so long as he remained unreconciled to Heaven. Tilgath-pilneser, king of Assyria, welcomed this opportunity of interfering in the affairs of Western Asia, and saw attractive prospects of levying blackmail impartially on his ally and his enemies. He came unto Ahaz, "and distressed him, but strengthened him not." These new troubles were the occasion of fresh wickedness on the part of the king: to pay the price of this worse than useless intervention, he took away a portion not only from his own treasury and from the princes, but also from the treasury of the Temple, and gave it to the king of Assyria.

Thus betrayed and plundered by his new ally, he trespassed "yet more against Jehovah, this same king Ahaz." It is almost incredible that one man could be

[1] 2 Chron. xxviii. 5–15, peculiar to Chronicles; cf. 2 Kings xvi. 5, 6.

guilty of so much sin; the chronicler is anxious that his readers should appreciate the extraordinary wickedness of this man, this same king Ahaz. In him the chastening of the Lord yielded no peaceable fruit of righteousness; he would not see that his misfortunes were sent from the offended God of Israel. With perverse ingenuity, he found in them an incentive to yet further wickedness. His pantheon was not large enough. He had omitted to worship the gods of Damascus. These must be powerful deities, whom it would be worth while to conciliate, because they had enabled the kings of Syria to overrun and pillage Judah. Therefore Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of Syria, that they might help him. "But," says the chronicler, "they were the ruin of him and of all Israel." Still Ahaz went on consistently with his policy of comprehensive eclecticism. He made Jerusalem a very Athens for altars, which were set up at every street corner; he discovered yet other gods whom it might be advisable to adore: "And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods."

Hitherto Jehovah had still received some share of the worship of this most religious king, but apparently Ahaz came to regard Him as the least powerful of his many supernatural allies. He attributed his misfortunes, not to the anger, but to the helplessness, of Jehovah. Jehovah was specially the God of Israel; if disaster after disaster fell upon His people, He was evidently less potent than Baal, or Moloch, or Rimmon. It was a useless expense to maintain the worship of so impotent a deity. Perhaps the apostate king was acting in the blasphemous spirit of the savage who flogs his idol when his prayers are not answered. Jehovah, he thought, should be punished for His neglect of the in-

terests of Judah. "Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of Jehovah";[1] he had filled up the measure of his iniquities.

And thus it came to pass that in the Holy City, "which Jehovah had chosen to cause His name to dwell there," almost the only deity who was not worshipped was Jehovah. Ahaz did homage to the gods of all the nations before whom he had been humiliated; the royal sacrifices smoked upon a hundred altars, but no sweet savour of burnt offering ascended to Jehovah. The fragrance of the perpetual incense no longer filled the holy place morning and evening; the seven lamps of the golden candlestick were put out, and the Temple was given up to darkness and desolation. Ahaz had contented himself with stripping the sanctuary of its treasures; but the building itself, though closed, suffered no serious injury. A stranger visiting the city, and finding it full of idols, could not fail to notice the great pile of the Temple and to inquire what image, splendid above all others, occupied that magnificent shrine. Like Pompey, he would learn with surprise that it was not the dwelling-place of any image, but the symbol of an almighty and invisible presence. Even if the stranger were some Moabite worshipper of Chemosh, he would feel dismay at the wanton profanity with which Ahaz had abjured the God of his fathers and desecrated the temple built by his great ancestors. The annals of Egypt and Babylon told of the misfortunes which had befallen those monarchs who were unfaithful to their national gods. The pious heathen

[1] 2 Chron. xxviii. 16–25, peculiar to Chronicles; cf. 2 Kings xvi. 7–18.

would anticipate disaster as the punishment of Ahaz's apostacy.

Meanwhile the ministers of the Temple shared its ruin and degradation; but they could feel the assurance that Jehovah would yet recall His people to their allegiance and manifest Himself once more in the Temple. The house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi possessed their souls in patience till the final judgment of Jehovah should fall upon the apostate. They had not long to wait: after a reign of only sixteen years, Ahaz died at the early age of thirty-six. We are not told that he died in battle or by the visitation of God. His health may have been broken by his many misfortunes, or by vicious practices that would naturally accompany his manifold idolatries; but in any case his early death would be regarded as a Divine judgment. The breath was scarcely out of his body before his religious innovations were swept away by a violent reaction. The people at once passed sentence of condemnation on his memory: "They brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel."[1] His successor inaugurated his reign by reopening the Temple, and brought back Judah to the obedience of Jehovah. The monuments of the impious worship of the wicked king, his multitudinous idols, and their ritual passed away like an evil dream, like "the track of a ship in the sea or a bird in the air."

The leading features of this career are common to most of the wicked kings and to the evil days of the good kings. "Walking in the ways of the kings of Israel" was the great crime of Jehoshaphat and his successors Jehoram and Ahaziah. Other kings, like

[1] xxviii. 27, peculiar to Chronicles.

Manasseh, built high places and followed after the abominations of the heathen whom Jehovah cast out before the children of Israel. Asa's lapse into wickedness began by plundering the Temple treasury to purchase an alliance with a heathen king, the king of Syria, against whose successor Ahaz in his turn hired the king of Assyria. Amaziah adopted the gods of Edom, as Ahaz the gods of Syria, but with less excuse, for Amaziah had conquered Edom. Other crimes are recorded among the evil doings of the kings: Asa had recourse to physicians, that is, probably to magic; Jehoram slew his brethren; Joash murdered the son of his benefactor Jehoiada; but the supreme sin was disloyalty to Jehovah and the Temple, and of this sin the chronicler's brief history of Ahaz is the most striking illustration. Ahaz is the typical apostate: he hardens his heart alike against the mercy of Jehovah and against His repeated judgment. He is a very Pharaoh among the kings of Judah. The discipline that should have led to repentance is continually perverted to be the occasion of new sin, and at last the apostate dies in his iniquity. The effect of the picture is heightened by its insistence on this one sin of apostacy; other sins are illustrated and condemned elsewhere, but here the chronicler would have us concentrate our attention on the rise, progress, and ruin of the apostate. Indeed, this one sin implied and involved all others; the man who suppressed the worship of Jehovah, and revelled in the obscene superstitions of heathen cults, was obviously capable of any enormity. The chronicler is not indifferent to morality as compared with ritual, and he sees in the neglect of Divinely appointed ritual an indication of a character rotten through and through. In his time

neglect of ritual on the part of the average man or the average king implied neglect of religion, or rather adherence to an alien and immoral faith.

Thus the supreme sin of the wicked kings naturally contrasts with the highest virtue of the good kings. The standing of both is determined by their attitude towards Jehovah. The character of the good kings is developed in greater detail than that of their wicked brethren; but we should not misrepresent the chronicler's views, if we ascribed to the wicked kings all the vices antithetic to the virtues of his royal ideal. Nevertheless the picture actually drawn fixes our attention upon their impious denial of the God of Israel. Much Church history has been written on the same principle: Constantine is a saint because he established Christianity; Julian is an incarnation of wickedness because he became an apostate; we praise the orthodox Theodosius, and blame the Arian Valens. Protestant historians have canonised Henry VIII. and Elizabeth, and have prefixed an unholy epithet to the name of their kinswoman, while Romanist writers interchange these verdicts. But underlying even such opposite judgments there is the same valid principle, the principle that was in the mind of the chronicler: that the king's relation to the highest and purest truth accessible to him, whatever that truth may be, is a just criterion of his whole character. The historian may err in applying the criterion, but its general principle is none the less sound.

For the character of the wicked nation we are not left to the general suggestions that may be derived from the wicked king. The prophets show us that it was by no vicarious condemnation that priests and people shared the ruin of their sovereign. In their

pages the subject is treated from many points of view: Israel and Judah, Edom and Tyre, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon, serve in their turn as models for the picture of the wicked nation. In the Apocalypse the ancient picture is adapted to new circumstances, and the City of the Seven Hills takes the place of Babylon. Modern prophets have further adapted the treatment of the subject to their own times, and for the most part to their own people. With stern and uncompromising patriotism, Carlyle and Ruskin have sought righteousness for England even at the expense of its reputation; they have emphasised its sin and selfishness in order to produce repentance and reform. For other teachers the history of foreign peoples has furnished the picture of the wicked nation, and the France of the Revolution or the "unspeakable" Turk has been held up as an example of all that is abominable in national life.

Any detailed treatment of this theme in Scripture would need an exposition, not merely of Chronicles, but of the whole Bible. We may, however, make one general application of the chronicler's principle that the wicked nation is the nation that forgets God. We do not now measure a people's religion by the number and magnificence of its priests and churches, or by the amount of money devoted to the maintenance of public worship. The most fatal symptoms of national depravity are the absence of a healthy public opinion, indifference to character in politics, neglect of education as a means of developing character, and the stifling of the spirit of brotherhood in a desperate struggle for existence. When God is thus forgotten, and the gracious influences of His Spirit are no longer recognised in public and private life, a country may well be degraded into the ranks of the wicked nations.

The perfectly general terms in which the doings and experiences of Ahaz are described facilitate the application of their warnings to the ordinary individual. His royal station only appears in the form and scale of his wickedness, which in its essence is common to him with the humblest sinner. Every young man enters, like Ahaz, upon a royal inheritance; character and career are as all-important to a peasant or a shopgirl as they are to an emperor or a queen. When a girl of seventeen or a youth of twenty succeeds to some historic throne, we are moved to think of the heavy burden of responsibility laid upon inexperienced shoulders and of the grave issues that must be determined during the swiftly passing years of their early manhood and womanhood. Alas, this heavy burden and these grave issues are but the common lot. The young sovereign is happy in the fierce light that beats upon his throne, for he is not allowed to forget the dignity and importance of life. History, with its stories of good and wicked kings, has obviously been written for his instruction; if the time be out of joint, as it mostly is, he has been born to set it right. It is all true, yet it is equally true for every one of his subjects. His lot is only the common lot set upon a hill, in the full sunlight, to illustrate, interpret, and influence lower and obscurer lives. People take such eager interest in the doings of royal families, their christenings, weddings, and funerals, because therein the common experience is, as it were, glorified into adequate dignity and importance.

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem"; but most men and women begin to reign before they are twenty. The history of Judah for those sixteen years was really determined long before Ahaz was invested with crown

and sceptre. Men should all be educated to reign, to respect themselves and appreciate their opportunities. We do in some measure adopt this principle with promising lads. Their energies are stimulated by the prospect of making a fortune or a name, or the more soaring imagination dreams of a seat on the woolsack or on one of the Front Benches. Gifted girls are also encouraged, as becomes their gifts, to achieve a brilliant marriage or a popular novel. We need to apply the principle more consistently and to recognise the royal dignity of the average life and of those whom the superior person is pleased to call commonplace people. It may then be possible to induce the ordinary young man to take a serious interest in his own future. The stress laid on the sanctity and supreme value of the individual soul has always been a vital element of evangelical teaching; like most other evangelical truths, it is capable of deeper meaning and wider application than are commonly recognised in systematic theology.

We have kept our sovereign waiting too long on the threshold of his kingdom; his courtiers and his people are impatient to know the character and intentions of their new master. So with every heir who succeeds to his royal inheritance. The fortunes of millions may depend upon the will of some young Czar or Kaiser; the happiness of a hundred tenants or of a thousand workmen may rest on the disposition of the youthful inheritor of a wide estate or a huge factory; but none the less in the poorest cottage mother and father and friends wait with trembling anxiety to see how the boy or girl will "turn out" when they take their destinies into their own hands and begin to reign. Already perhaps some tender maiden watches in hope and fear, in mingled pride and misgiving, the rapidly unfolding

character of the youth to whom she has promised to commit all the happiness of a life-time.

And to each one in turn there comes the choice of Hercules; according to the chronicler's phrase, the young king may either "do right in the eyes of Jehovah, like David his father," or he may walk "in the ways of the kings of Israel, and make molten images for the Baals."

The "right doings of David his father" may point to family traditions, which set a high standard of noble conduct for each succeeding generation. The teaching and influence of the pious Jotham are represented by the example of godliness set in many a Christian home, by the wise and loving counsel of parents and friends. And Ahaz has many modern parallels, sons and daughters upon whom every good influence seems spent in vain. They are led astray into the ways of the kings of Israel, and make molten images for the Baals. There were several dynasties of the kings of Israel, and the Baals were many and various; there are many tempters who deliberately or unconsciously lay snares for souls, and they serve different powers of evil. Israel was for the most part more powerful, wealthy, and cultured than Judah. When Ahaz came to the throne as a mere youth, Pekah was apparently in the prime of life and the zenith of power. He is no inapt symbol of what the modern tempter at any rate desires to appear: the showy, pretentious man of the world, who parades his knowledge of life, and impresses the inexperienced youth with his shrewdness and success, and makes his victim eager to imitate him, to walk in the ways of the kings of Israel.

Moreover, the prospect of making molten images for the Baals is an insidious temptation. Ahaz perhaps

found the decorous worship of the one God dull and monotonous. Baals meant new gods and new rites, with all the excitement of novelty and variety. Jotham may not have realised that this youth of twenty was a man: the heir-apparent may have been treated as a child and left too much to the women of the harem. Responsible activity might have saved Ahaz. The Church needs to recognise that healthy, vigorous youth craves interesting occupation and even excitement. If a father wishes to send his son to the devil, he cannot do better than make that son's life, both secular and religious, a routine of monotonous drudgery. Then any pinchbeck king of Israel will seem a marvel of wit and good fellowship, and the making of molten images a most pleasing diversion. A molten image is something solid, permanent, and conspicuous, a standing advertisement of the enterprise and artistic taste of the maker; he engraves his name on the pedestal, and is proud of the honourable distinction. Many of our modern molten images are duly set forth in popular works, for instance the reputation for impure life, or hard drinking, or reckless gambling, to achieve which some men have spent their time, and money, and toil. Other molten images are dedicated to another class of Baals: Mammon the respectable and Belial the polite.

The next step in the history of Ahaz is also typical of many a rake's progress. The king of Israel, in whose ways he has walked, turns upon him and plunders him; the experienced man of the world gives his pupil painful proof of his superiority, and calls in his confederates to share the spoil. Now surely the victim's eyes will be opened to the life he is leading and the character of his associates. By no means. Ahaz has been conquered by Syria, and there-

fore he will worship the gods of Syria, and he will have a confederate of his own in the Assyrian king. The victim tries to master the arts by which he has been robbed and ill-treated; he will become as unscrupulous as his masters in wickedness. He seeks the profit and distinction of being the accomplice of bold and daring sinners, men as pre-eminent in evil as Tilgath-pilneser in Western Asia; and they, like the Assyrian king, take his money and accept his flattery: they use him and then cast him off more humiliated and desperate than ever. He sinks into a prey of meaner scoundrels: the Edomites and Philistines of fast life; and then, in his extremity, he builds new high places and sacrifices to more new gods; he has recourse to all the shifty expedients and sordid superstitions of the devotees of luck and chance.

All this while he has still paid some external homage to religion; he has observed the conventions of honour and good breeding. There have been services, as it were, in the temple of Jehovah. Now he begins to feel that this deference has not met with an adequate reward; he has been no better treated than the flagrantly disreputable: indeed, these men have often got the better of him. "It is vain to serve God; what profit is there in keeping His charge and in walking mournfully before the Lord of hosts? The proud are called happy; they that work wickedness are built up: they tempt God, and are delivered." His moods vary; and, with reckless inconsistency, he sometimes derides religion as worthless and unmeaning, and sometimes seeks to make God responsible for his sins and misfortunes. At one time he says he knows all about religion and has seen through it; he was brought up to pious ways, and his mature judgment has shown

him that piety is a delusion; he will no longer countenance its hypocrisy and cant: at another time he complains that he has been exposed to special temptations and has not been provided with special safeguards; the road that leads to life has been made too steep and narrow, and he has been allowed without warning and remonstrance to tread "the primrose path that leads to the everlasting bonfire"; he will cast off altogether the dull formalities and irksome restraints of religion; he will work wickedness with a proud heart and a high hand. His happiness and success have been hindered by pedantic scruples; now he will be built up and delivered from his troubles. He gets rid of the few surviving relics of the old honourable life. The service of prayer and praise ceases; the lamp of truth is put out; the incense of holy thought no longer perfumes the soul; and the temple of the Spirit is left empty, and dark, and desolate.

At last, in what should be the prime of manhood, the sinner, broken-hearted, worn out in mind and body, sinks into a dishonoured grave.

The career and fate of Ahaz may have other parallels besides this, but it is sufficiently clear that the chronicler's picture of the wicked king is no mere antiquarian study of a vanished past. It lends itself with startling facility to illustrate the fatal downward course of any man who, entering on the royal inheritance of human life, allies himself with the powers of darkness and finally becomes their slave.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRIESTS

THE Israelite priesthood must be held to include the Levites. Their functions and status differed from those of the house of Aaron in degree, and not in kind. They formed a hereditary caste set apart for the service of the sanctuary, and as such they shared the revenues of the Temple with the sons of Aaron. The priestly character of the Levites is more than once implied in Chronicles. After the disruption, we are told that "the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to Rehoboam," because "Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not exercise the priest's office unto Jehovah." On an emergency, as at Hezekiah's great feast at the reopening of the Temple, the Levites might even discharge priestly functions. Moreover, the chronicler seems to recognise the priestly character of the whole tribe of Levi by retaining in a similar connection the old phrase "the priests the Levites."[1]

The relation of the Levites to the priests, the sons of Aaron, was not that of laymen to clergy, but of an inferior clerical order to their superiors. When

[1] 2 Chron. xi. 13, 14, xxix. 34, xxx. 27, all peculiar to Chronicles. In xxx. 27 the text is doubtful; many authorities have "the priests and the Levites."

Charlotte Brontë has occasion to devote a chapter to curates, she heads it "Levitical." The Levites, again, like deacons in the Church of England, were forbidden to perform the most sacred ritual of Divine service. Technically their relation to the sons of Aaron might be compared to that of deacons to priests or of priests to bishops. From the point of view of numbers,[1] revenues, and social standing, the sons of Aaron might be compared to the dignitaries of the Church: archbishops, bishops, archdeacons, deans, and incumbents of livings with large incomes and little work; while the Levites would correspond to the more moderately paid and fully occupied clergy. Thus the nature of the distinction between the priests and the Levites shows that they were essentially only two grades of the same order; and this corresponds roughly to what has been generally denoted by the term "priesthood." Priesthood, however, had a more limited meaning in Israel than in later times. In some branches of the Christian Church, the priests exercise or claim to exercise functions which in Israel belonged to the prophets or the king.

Before considering the central and essential idea of the priest as a minister of public worship, we will notice some of his minor duties. We have seen that the sanctity of civil government is emphasised by the religious supremacy of the king; the same truth is also illustrated by the fact that the priests and Levites were sometimes the king's officers for civil affairs. Under David, certain Levites of Hebron are spoken of as having the oversight of all Israel, both east and

[1] *I.e.*, in the view given us by the chronicler of the period of the monarchy, after the Return the priests were far more numerous than the Levites.

west of Jordan, not only "for all the business of Jehovah," but also "for the service of the king."[1] The business of the law-courts was recognised by Jehoshaphat as the judgment of Jehovah, and accordingly amongst the judges there were priests and Levites.[2] Similarly the mediæval governments often found their most efficient and trustworthy administrators in the bishops and clergy, and were glad to reinforce their secular authority by the sanction of the Church; and even to-day bishops sit in Parliament: incumbents preside over vestries, and sometimes act as county magistrates. But the interest of religion in civil government is most manifest in the moral influence exercised unofficially by earnest and public-spirited ministers of all denominations.

The chronicler refers more than once to the educational work of the priests, and especially of the Levites. The English version probably gives his real meaning when it attributes to him the phrase "teaching priest."[3] Jehoshaphat's educational commission was largely composed of priests and Levites, and Levites are spoken of as scribes. Jewish education was largely religious, and naturally fell into the hands of the priesthood, just as the learning of Egypt and Babylon was chiefly in the hands of priests and magi. The Christian ministry maintained the ancient traditions: the monasteries were the homes of mediæval learning, and till recently England and Scotland mainly owed their schools to the Churches, and almost all schoolmasters of any position were in holy orders—priests and Levites.

[1] 1 Chron. xxvi. 30–32.

[2] 2 Chron. xix. 4–11.

[3] 2 Chron. xv. 3. In the older literature the phrase would bear a more special and technical meaning.

Under our new educational system the free choice of the people places many ministers of religion on the school boards.

The next characteristic of the priesthood is not so much in accordance with Christian theory and practice. The house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi were a Church militant in a very literal sense. In the beginning of their history the tribe of Levi earned the blessing of Jehovah by the pious zeal with which they flew to arms in His cause and executed His judgment upon their guilty fellow-countrymen.[1] Later on, when "Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor, and the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel,"[2] then stood up Phinehas, "the ancestor of the house of Zadok," and executed judgment.

> "And so the plague was stayed,
> And that was counted unto him for righteousness
> Unto all generations for evermore."[3]

But the militant character of the priesthood was not confined to its early history. Amongst those who "came armed for war to David to Hebron to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of Jehovah," were four thousand six hundred of the children of Levi and three thousand seven hundred of the house of Aaron, "and Zadok, a young man mighty of valour, and twenty-two captains of his father's house."[4] "The third captain of David's army for the third month was Benaiah the son of Jehoiada the priest."[5]

David's Hebronite overseers were all "mighty men of valour." When Judah went out to war, the trumpets

[1] Exod. xxxii. 26–35.
[2] Num. xxv. 3.
[3] Psalm cvi. 30, 31.
[4] 1 Chron. xii. 23–28.
[5] 1 Chron. xxvii. 5; cf., however, R.V. marg.

of the priests gave the signal for battle[1]; when the high-priest Jehoiada recovered the kingdom for Joash, the Levites compassed the king round about, every man with his weapons in his hand[2]; when Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem, "every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon,"[3] and amongst the rest the priests. Later on, when Jehovah delivered Israel from the hand of Antiochus Epiphanes, the priestly family of the Maccabees, in the spirit of their ancestor Phinehas, fought and died for the Law and the Temple. There were priestly soldiers as well as priestly generals, for we read how "at that time certain priests, desirous to show their valour, were slain in battle, for that they went out to fight inadvisedly."[4] In the Jewish war the priest Josephus was Jewish commander in Galilee.

Christianity has aroused a new sentiment with regard to war. We believe that the servant of the Lord must not strive in earthly battles. Arms may be lawful for the Christian citizen, but it is felt to be unseemly that the ministers who are the ambassadors of the Prince of Peace should themselves be men of blood. Even in the Middle Ages fighting prelates like Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, were felt to be exceptional anomalies; and the prince-bishops and electoral archbishops were often ecclesiastics only in name. To-day the Catholic Church in France resents the conscription of its seminarists as an act of vindictive persecution.

And yet the growth of Christian sentiment in favour

[1] 2 Chron. xiii. 12.

[2] 2 Chron. xxiii. 7. All the passages referred to in this paragraph are peculiar to Chronicles.

[3] Neh. iv. 17.

[4] 1 Macc. v. 67.

of peace has not prevented the occasional combination of the soldier and the ecclesiastic. If Islam has had its armies of dervishes, Cyril's monks fought for orthodoxy at Alexandria and at Constantinople with all the ferocity of wild beasts. The Crusaders, the Templars, the Knights of St. John, were in varying degrees partly priests and partly soldiers. Cromwell's Ironsides, when they were wielding carnal weapons in their own defence or in any other good cause, were as expert as any Levites at exhortations and psalms and prayers; and in our own day certain generals and admirals are fond of playing the amateur ecclesiastic. In this, as in so much else, while we deny the form of Judaism, we retain its spirit. Havelock and Gordon were no unworthy successors of the Maccabees.

The characteristic function, however, of the Jewish priesthood was their ministry in public worship, in which they represented the people before Jehovah. In this connection public worship does not necessarily imply that the public were present, or that the worship in question was the united act of a great assembly. Such worshipping assemblies were not uncommon, especially at the feasts; but ordinary public worship was worship on behalf of the people, not by the people. The priests and Levites were part of an elaborate system of symbolic ritual. Worshippers might gather in the Temple courts, but the Temple itself was not a place in which public meetings for worship were held, and the people were not admitted into it. The Temple was Jehovah's house, and His presence there was symbolised by the Ark. In this system of ritual the priests and Levites represented Israel; their sacrifices and ministrations were the acceptable offerings of the nation to God. If the sacrifices were duly offered by

the priests "according to all that was written in the law of Jehovah, and if the priests with trumpets and the Levites with psalteries, and harps, and cymbals duly ministered before the ark of Jehovah to celebrate, and thank, and praise Jehovah, the God of Israel," then the Divine service of Israel was fully performed. The whole people could not be regularly present at a single sanctuary, nor would they be adequately represented by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and casual visitors from the rest of the country. Three times a year the nation was fully and naturally represented by those who came up to the feasts, but usually the priests and Levites stood in their place.

When an assembly gathered for public worship at a feast or any other time, the priests and Levites expressed the devotion of the people. They performed the sacrificial rites, they blew the trumpets and played upon the psalteries, and harps, and cymbals, and sang the praises of Jehovah. The people were dismissed by the priestly blessing. When an individual offered a sacrifice as an act of private worship, the assistance of the priests and Levites was still necessary. At the same time the king as well as the priesthood might lead the people in praise and prayer, and the Temple psalmody was not confined to the Levitical choir. When the Ark was brought away from Kirjath-jearim, "David and all Israel played before God with all their might, even with songs, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets"; and when at last the Ark had been safely housed in Jerusalem, and the due sacrifices had all been offered, David dismissed the people in priestly fashion by blessing them in the name of Jehovah.[1] At

[1] 1 Chron. xiii. 8; xvi. 2.

the two solemn assemblies which celebrated the beginning and the close of the great enterprise of building the Temple, public prayer was offered, not by the priests, but by David[1] and Solomon.[2] Similarly Jehoshaphat led the prayers of the Jews when they gathered to seek deliverance from the invading Moabites and Ammonites. Hezekiah at his great passover both exhorted the people and interceded for them, and Jehovah accepted his intercession; but on this occasion, when the festival was over, it was not the king, but "the priests the Levites,"[3] who "arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even unto heaven." In the descriptions of Hezekiah's and Josiah's festivals, the orchestra and choir, of course, are busy with the music and singing; otherwise the main duty of the priests and Levites is to sacrifice. In his graphic account of Josiah's passover, the chronicler no doubt reproduces on a larger scale the busy scenes in which he himself had often taken part. The king, the princes, and the chiefs of the Levites had provided between them thirty-seven thousand six hundred lambs and kids and three thousand eight hundred oxen for sacrifices; and the resources of the establishment of the Temple were taxed to the utmost. "So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites by the courses, according to the king's commandment. And they killed the passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of their hand, and the Levites flayed the sacrifices. And they removed the burnt offerings, that they might give them

[1] 1 Chron. xxix. 10–19.

[2] 2 Chron. vi.

[3] 2 Chron. xx. 4–13; xxx. 6–9, 18–21, 27.

according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the children of the people, to offer unto Jehovah, as it is written in the law of Moses; and so they did with the oxen. And they roasted the passover according to the ordinance; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, and caldrons, and pans, and carried them quickly to all the children of the people. And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests the sons of Aaron were busied in offering the burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests the sons of Aaron. And the singers were in their place, and the porters were at their several gates; they needed not to depart from their service, for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. So all the service of Jehovah was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of Jehovah."[1] Thus even in the accounts of great public gatherings for worship the main duty of the priests and Levites is to perform the sacrifices. The music and singing naturally fall into their hands, because the necessary training is only possible to a professional choir. Otherwise the now symbolic portions of the service, prayer, exhortation, and blessing, were not exclusively reserved to ecclesiastics.

The priesthood, like the Ark, the Temple, and the ritual, belonged essentially to the system of religious symbolism. This was their peculiar domain, into which no outsider might intrude. Only the Levites could touch the Ark. When the unhappy Uzzah "put forth his hand to the Ark," "the anger of Jehovah was kindled against him; and he smote Uzzah so that he

[1] 2 Chron. xxxv.

died there before God."[1] The king might offer up public prayer; but when Uzziah ventured to go into the Temple to burn incense upon the altar of incense, leprosy broke forth in his forehead, and the priests thrust him out quickly from the Temple.[2]

Thus the symbolic and representative character of the priesthood and ritual gave the sacrifices and other ceremonies a value in themselves, apart alike from the presence of worshippers and the feelings or "intention" of the officiating minister. They were the provision made by Israel for the expression of its prayer, its penitence and thanksgiving. When sin had estranged Jehovah from His people, the sons of Aaron made atonement for Israel; they performed the Divinely appointed ritual by which the nation made submission to its offended King and cast itself upon His mercy. The Jewish sacrifices had features which have survived in the sacrifice of the Mass, and the multiplication of sacrifices arose from motives similar to those that lead to the offering up of many masses.

One would expect, as has happened in the Christian Church, that the ministrants of the symbolic ritual would annex the other acts of public worship, not only praise, but also prayer and exhortation. Considerations of convenience would suggest such an amalgamation of functions; and among the priests, while the more ambitious would see in preaching a means of extending their authority, the more earnest would be anxious to use their unique position to promote the spiritual life of the people. Chronicles, however, affords few traces of any such tendency; and the great scene in the book of Nehemiah in which Ezra and the

[1] 1 Chron. xiii. 10. [2] 2 Chron. xxvi. 16–23.

Levites expound the Law had no connection with the Temple and its ritual. The development of the Temple service was checked by its exclusive privileges; it was simply impossible that the single sanctuary should continue to provide for all the religious wants of the Jews, and thus supplementary and inferior places of worship grew up to appropriate the non-ritual elements of service. Probably even in the chronicler's time the division of religious services between the Temple and the synagogue had already begun, with the result that the representative and symbolic character of the priesthood is almost exclusively emphasised.

The representative character of the priesthood has another aspect. Strictly the priest represented the nation before Jehovah; but in doing so it was inevitable that he should also in some measure represent Jehovah to the nation. He could not be the channel of worship offered to God without being also the channel of Divine grace to man. From the priest the worshipper learnt the will of God as to correct ritual, and received the assurance that the atoning sacrifice was duly accepted. The high-priest entered within the veil to make atonement for Israel; he came forth as the bearer of Divine forgiveness and renewed grace, and as he blessed the people he spoke in the name of Jehovah. We have been able to discern the presence of these ideas in Chronicles, but they are not very conspicuous. The chronicler was not a layman; he was too familiar with priests to feel any profound reverence for them. On the other hand, he was not himself a priest, but was specially preoccupied with the musicians, the Levites, and the doorkeepers; so that probably he does not give us an adequate idea of the relative dignity of the priests and the honour in which they were held by the

people. Organists and choirmasters, it is said, seldom take an exalted view of their minister's office.

The chronicler deals more fully with a matter in which priests and Levites were alike interested: the revenues of the Temple. He was doubtless aware of the bountiful provision made by the Law for his order, and loved to hold up this liberality of kings, princes, and people in ancient days for his contemporaries to admire and imitate. He records again and again the tens of thousands of sheep and oxen provided for sacrifice, not altogether unmindful of the rich dues that must have accrued to the priests out of all this abundance; he tells us how Hezekiah first set the good example of appointing "a portion of his substance for the burnt offerings," and then "commanded the people that dwelt at Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites that they might give themselves to the law of the Lord. And as soon as the commandment came abroad the children of Israel gave in abundance the first-fruits of corn, wine, and oil, and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly."[1] These were the days of old, the ancient years when the offering of Judah and Jerusalem was pleasant to Jehovah; when the people neither dared nor desired to offer on God's altar a scanty tale of blind, lame, and sick victims; when the tithes were not kept back, and there was meat in the house of God[2]; when, as Hezekiah's high-priest testified, they could eat and have enough and yet leave plenty.[3] The manner in which the chronicler tells the tale of ancient abundance suggests that his days were like the days

[1] 2 Chron. xxxi. 3–5. [2] Mal. i. 8; iii. 4, 10.
[3] 2 Chron. xxxi. 10.

of Malachi. He was no pampered ecclesiastic, revelling in present wealth and luxury, but a man who suffered hard times, and looked back wistfully to the happier experiences of his predecessors.

Let us now restore the complete picture of the chronicler's priest from his scattered references to the subject. The priest represents the nation before Jehovah, and in a less degree represents Jehovah to the nation; he leads their public worship, especially at the great festal gatherings; he teaches the people the Law. The high character, culture, and ability of the priests and Levites occasions their employment as judges and in other responsible civil offices. If occasion required, they could show themselves mighty men of valour in their country's wars. Under pious kings, they enjoyed ample revenues which gave them independence, added to their importance in the eyes of the people, and left them at leisure to devote themselves exclusively to their sacred duties.

In considering the significance of this picture, we can pass over without special notice the exercise by priests and Levites of the functions of leadership in public worship, teaching, and civil government. They are not essential to the priesthood, but are entirely consistent with the tenure of the priestly office, and naturally become associated with it. Warlike prowess was certainly no part of the priesthood; but, whatever may be true of Christian ministers, it is difficult to charge the priests of the Lord of hosts with inconsistency because, like Jehovah Himself, they were men of war[1] and went forth to battle in the armies of Israel. When a nation was continually fighting for its

[1] Exod. xv. 3.

very existence, it was impossible for one tribe out of the twelve to be non-combatant.

With regard to the representative character of the priests, it would be out of place here to enter upon the burning questions of sacerdotalism; but we may briefly point out the permanent truth underlying the ancient idea of the priesthood. The ideal spiritual life in every Church is one of direct fellowship between God and the believer.

> "Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can meet;
> Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet."

And yet a man may be truly religious and not realise this ideal, or only realise it very imperfectly. The gift of an intense and real spiritual life may belong to the humblest and poorest, to men of little intellect and less learning; but, none the less, it is not within the immediate reach of every believer, or indeed of any believer at every time. The descendants of Mr. Little-faith and Mr. Ready-to-halt are amongst us still, and there is no immediate prospect of their race becoming extinct. Times come when we are all glad to put ourselves under the safe conduct of Mr. Great-heart. There are many whose prayers seem to themselves too feebly winged to rise to the throne of grace; they are encouraged and helped when their petitions are borne upwards on the strong pinions of another's faith. George Eliot has pictured the Florentines as awed spectators of Savonarola's audiences with Heaven. To a congregation sometimes the minister's prayers are a sacred and solemn spectacle; his spiritual feeling is beyond them; he intercedes for blessings they neither desire nor understand; they miss the heavenly vision which stirs his soul. He is not their spokesman, but

their priest; he has entered the holy place, bearing with him the sins that crave forgiveness, the fears that beg for deliverance, the hopes that yearn to be fulfilled. Though the people may remain in the outer court, yet they are fully assured that he has passed into the very presence of God. They listen to him as to one who has had actual speech with the King and received the assurance of His goodwill towards them. When the vanguard of the Ten Thousand first sighted the Euxine, the cry of "Thalassa! Thalassa!" ("The sea! the sea!") rolled backward along the line of march; the rearguard saw the long-hoped-for sight with the eyes of the pioneers. Much unnecessary self-reproach would be avoided if we accepted this as one of God's methods of spiritual education, and understood that we all have in a measure to experience this discipline in humility. The priesthood of the believer is not merely his right to enter for himself into the immediate presence of God: it becomes his duty and privilege to represent others. But times will also come when he himself will need the support of a priestly intercession in the Divine presence-chamber, when he will seek out some one of quick sympathy and strong faith and say, "Brother, pray for me." Apart from any ecclesiastical theory of the priesthood, we all recognise that there are God-ordained priests, men and women, who can inspire dull souls with a sense of the Divine presence and bring to the sinful and the struggling the assurance of Divine forgiveness and help. If one in ten among the official priests of the historic Churches had possessed these supreme gifts, the world would have accepted the most extravagant sacerdotalism without a murmur. As it is, every minister, every one who leads the worship of a congregation, assumes for the time being

functions and should possess the corresponding qualifications. In his prayers he speaks for the people; he represents them before God; on their behalf he enters into the Divine presence; they only enter with him, if, as their spokesman and representative, he has grasped their feelings and raised them to the level of Divine fellowship. He may be an untutored labourer in his working garments; but if he can do this, this spiritual gift makes him a priest of God. But this Christian priesthood is not confined to public service; as the priest offered sacrifice for the individual Jew, so the man of spiritual sympathies helps the individual to draw near his Maker. "To pray with people" is a well-known ministry of Christian service, and it involves this priestly function of presenting another's prayers to God. This priesthood for individuals is exercised by many a Christian who has no gifts of public utterance.

The ancient priest held a representative position in a symbolic ritual, a position partly independent of his character and spiritual powers. Where symbolic ritual is best suited for popular needs, there may be room for a similar priesthood to-day. Otherwise the Christian priesthood is required to represent the people not in symbol, but in reality, to carry not the blood of dead victims into a material Holy of holies, but living souls into the heavenly temple.

There remains one feature of the Jewish priestly system upon which the chronicler lays great stress: the endowments and priestly dues. In the case of the high-priest and the Levites, whose whole time was devoted to sacred duties, it was obviously necessary that those who served the altar should live by the altar. The same principle would apply, but with much less force, to the twenty-four courses of priests, each

of which in its turn officiated at the Temple. But, apart from the needs of the priesthood, their representative character demanded that they should be able to maintain a certain state. They were the ambassadors of Israel to Jehovah. Nations have always been anxious that the equipment and suite of their representative at a foreign court should be worthy of their power and wealth; moreover, the splendour of an embassy should be in proportion to the rank of the sovereign to whom it is accredited. In former times, when the social symbols were held of more account, a first-rate power would have felt itself insulted if asked to receive an envoy of inferior rank, attended by only a meagre train. Israel, by her lavish endowment of the priesthood, consulted her own dignity and expressed her sense of the homage due to Jehovah. The Jews could not express their devotion in the same way as other nations. They had to be content with a single sanctuary, and might not build a multitude of magnificent temples or adorn their cities with splendid, costly statues in honour of God. There were limits to their expenditure upon the sacrifices and buildings of the Temple; but the priesthood offered a large opportunity for pious generosity. The chronicler felt that loyal enthusiasm to Jehovah would always use this opportunity, and that the priests might consent to accept the distinction of wealth and splendour for the honour alike of Israel and Jehovah. Their dignity was not personal to themselves, but rather the livery of a self-effacing servitude. For the honour of the Church, Thomas a Becket kept up a great establishment, appeared in his robes of office, and entertained a crowd of guests with luxurious fare; while he himself wore a hair shirt next his skin and fasted like an ascetic

monk. When the Jews stinted the ritual or the ministrants of Jehovah, they were doing what they could to put Him to open shame before the nations. Julian's experience in the grove of Daphne at Antioch was a striking illustration of the collapse of paganism: the imperial champion of the ancient gods must have felt his heart sink within him when he was welcomed to that once splendid sanctuary by one shabby priest dragging a solitary and reluctant goose to the deserted altar. Similarly Malachi saw that Israel's devotion to Jehovah was in danger of dying out when men chose the refuse of their flocks and herds and offered them grudgingly at the shrine.

The application of these principles leads directly to the question of a paid ministry; but the connection is not so close as it appears at first sight, nor are we yet in possession of all the data which the chronicler furnishes for its discussion. Priestly duties form an essential, but not predominant, part of the work of most Christian ministers. Still the loyal believer must always be anxious that the buildings, the services, and the men which, for himself and for the world, represent his devotion to Christ, should be worthy of their high calling. But his ideas of the symbolism suitable for spiritual realities are not altogether those of the chronicler: he is less concerned with number, size, and weight, with tens of thousands of sheep and oxen, vast quantities of stone and timber, brass and iron, and innumerable talents of gold and silver. Moreover, in this special connection the secondary priestly function of representing God to man has been expressly transferred by Christ to the least of His brethren. Those who wish to honour God with their substance in the person of His earthly representatives are enjoined

to seek for them in hospitals, and workhouses, and prisons, to find these representatives in the hungry, the thirsty, the friendless, the naked, the captives. No doubt Christ is dishonoured when those who dwell in "houses of cedar" are content to worship Him in a mean, dirty church, with a half-starved minister; but the most disgraceful proof of the Church's disloyalty to Christ is to be seen in the squalor and misery of men, and women, and children whose bodies were ordained of God to be the temples of His Holy Spirit.

This is only one among many illustrations of the truth that in Christ the symbolism of religion took a new departure. His Church enjoys the spiritual realities prefigured by the Jewish temple and its ministry. Even where Christian symbols are parallel to those of Judaism, they are less conventional and richer in their direct spiritual suggestiveness.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROPHETS

ONE remarkable feature of Chronicles as compared with the book of Kings is the greater interest shown by the former in the prophets of Judah. The chronicler, by confining his attention to the southern kingdom, was compelled to omit almost all reference to Elijah and Elisha, and thus exclude from his work some of the most thrilling chapters in the history of the prophets of Israel. Nevertheless the prophets as a whole play almost as important a part in Chronicles as in the book of Kings. Compensation is made for the omission of the two great northern prophets by inserting accounts of several prophets whose messages were addressed to the kings of Judah.

The chronicler's interest in the prophets was very different from the interest he took in the priests and Levites. The latter belonged to the institutions of his own time, and formed his own immediate circle. In dealing with their past, he was reconstructing the history of his own order; he was able to illustrate and supplement from observation and experience the information afforded by his sources.

But when the chronicler wrote, prophets had ceased to be a living institution in Judah. The light that had shone so brightly in Isaiah and Jeremiah burned feebly in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and then went out.

Not long after the chronicler's time the failure of prophecy is expressly recognised. The people whose synagogues have been burnt up complain,—

> "We see not our signs;
> There is no more any prophet."[1]

When Judas Maccabæus appointed certain priests to cleanse the Temple after its pollution by the Syrians, they pulled down the altar of burnt offerings because the heathen had defiled it, and laid up the stones in the mountain of the Temple in a convenient place, until there should come a prophet to show what should be done with them.[2] This failure of prophecy was not merely brief and transient. It marked the disappearance of the ancient order of prophets. A parallel case shows how the Jews had become aware that the high-priest no longer possessed the special gifts connected with the Urim and Thummim. When certain priests could not find their genealogies, they were forbidden "to eat of the most holy things till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim."[3] We have no record of any subsequent appearance of "a priest with Urim and with Thummim" or of any prophet of the old order.

Thus the chronicler had never seen a prophet; his conception of the personality and office of the prophet was entirely based upon ancient literature, and he took no professional interest in the order. At the same time he had no prejudice against them; they had no living successors to compete for influence and endowments

[1] Psalm lxxiv. 8, 9. This psalm is commonly regarded as Maccabæan, but may be as early as the chronicler or even earlier.

[2] 1 Macc. iv. 46.

[3] Ezra ii. 63.

with the priests and Levites. Possibly the Levites, as the chief religious teachers of the people, claimed some sort of apostolic succession from the prophets; but there are very slight grounds for any such theory. The chronicler's information on the whole subject was that of a scholar with a taste for antiquarian research.

Let us briefly examine the part played by the prophets in the history of Judah as given by Chronicles. We have first, as in the book of Kings, the references to Nathan and Gad: they make known to David the will of Jehovah as regards the building of the Temple and the punishment of David's pride in taking the census of Israel. David unhesitatingly accepts their messages as the word of Jehovah. It is important to notice that when Nathan is consulted about building the Temple he first answers, apparently giving a mere private opinion, "Do all that is in thine heart, for God is with thee"; but when "the word of God comes" to him, he retracts his former judgment and forbids David to build the Temple. Here again the plan of the chronicler's work leads to an important omission: his silence as to the murder of Uriah prevents him from giving the beautiful and instructive account of the way in which Nathan rebuked the guilty king. Later narratives exhibit other prophets in the act of rebuking most of the kings of Judah, but none of these incidents are equally striking and pathetic. At the end of the histories of David and of most of the later kings we find notes which apparently indicate that, in the chronicler's time, the prophets were credited with having written the annals of the kings with whom they were contemporary. In connection with Hezekiah's reformation we are incidentally told that Nathan and Gad were associated with David in making arrange-

ments for the music of the Temple: "He set the Levites in the house of Jehovah, with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet, for the commandment was of Jehovah by His prophets."[1]

In the account of Solomon's reign, the chronicler omits the interview of Ahijah the Shilonite with Jeroboam, but refers to it in the history of Rehoboam. From this point, in accordance with his general plan, he omits almost all missions of prophets to the northern kings.

In Rehoboam's reign, we have recorded, as in the book of Kings, a message from Jehovah by Shemaiah forbidding the king and his two tribes of Judah and Benjamin to attempt to compel the northern tribes to return to their allegiance to the house of David. Later on, when Shishak invaded Judah, Shemaiah was commissioned to deliver to the king and princes the message, "Thus saith Jehovah: Ye have forsaken Me; therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak."[2] But when they repented and humbled themselves before Jehovah, Shemaiah announced to them the mitigation of their punishment.

Asa's reformation was due to the inspired exhortations of a prophet called both Oded and Azariah the son of Oded. Later on Hanani the seer rebuked the king for his alliance with Benhadad, king of Syria. "Then Asa was wroth with the seer, and put him in the prison-house; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing."[3]

[1] 2 Chron. xxix. 25, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] 2 Chron. xii. 5-8, peculiar to Chronicles.

[3] 2 Chron. xv.-xvi. 10, peculiar to Chronicles.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab and his consequent visit to Samaria enabled the chronicler to introduce from the book of Kings the striking narrative of Micaiah the son of Imlah; but this alliance with Israel earned for the king the rebukes of Jehu the son of Hanani the seer and Eliezar the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah. However, on the occasion of the Moabite and Ammonite invasion Jehoshaphat and his people received the promise of Divine deliverance from "Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah the Levite, of the sons of Asaph."[1]

The punishment of the wicked king Jehoram was announced to him by "a writing from Elijah the prophet."[2] His son Ahaziah apparently perished without any prophetic warning; but when Joash and his princes forsook the house of Jehovah and served the Asherim and the idols, "He sent prophets to them to bring them again to Jehovah," among the rest Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest. Joash turned a deaf ear to the message, and put the prophet to death.[3]

When Amaziah bowed down before the gods of Edom and burned incense unto them, Jehovah sent unto him a prophet whose name is not recorded. His mission failed, like that of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada; and Amaziah, like Joash, showed no respect for the person of the messenger of Jehovah. In this case the prophet escaped with his life. He began to deliver his message, but the king's patience soon failed, and he said unto the prophet, "Have we made thee of

[1] 2 Chron. xix. 2, 3, xx. 14-18, 37, all peculiar to Chronicles.
[2] xxi. 12-15, peculiar to Chronicles.
[3] xxiv. 18-22, peculiar to Chronicles.

the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten?" The prophet, we are told, "forbare"; but his forbearance did not prevent his adding one brief and bitter sentence: "I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this and hast not hearkened unto my counsel."[1] Then apparently he departed in peace and was not smitten.

We have now reached the period of the prophets whose writings are extant. We learn from the headings of their works that Isaiah saw his "vision," and that the word of Jehovah came unto Hosea, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; that the word of Jehovah came to Micah in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah; and that Amos "saw" his "words" in the days of Uzziah. But the chronicler makes no reference to any of these prophets in connection with either Uzziah, Jotham, or Ahaz. Their writings would have afforded the best possible materials for his history, yet he entirely neglected them. In view of his anxiety to introduce into his narrative all missions of prophets of which he found any record, we can only suppose that he was so little interested in the prophetical writings that he neither referred to them nor recollected their dates.

To Ahaz in Chronicles, in spite of all his manifold and persistent idolatry, no prophet was sent. The absence of Divine warning marks his extraordinary wickedness. In the book of Samuel the culmination of Jehovah's displeasure against Saul is shown by His refusal to answer him either by dreams, by Urim, or by prophets. He sends no prophet to Ahaz, because the wicked king of Judah is utterly reprobate. Prophecy,

[1] xxv. 15, 16, peculiar to Chronicles.

the token of the Divine presence and favour, has abandoned a nation given over to idolatry, and has even taken a temporary refuge in Samaria. Jerusalem was no longer worthy to receive the Divine messages, and Oded was sent with his words of warning and humane exhortation to the children of Ephraim. There he met with a prompt and full obedience, in striking contrast to the reception accorded by Joash and Amaziah to the prophets of Jehovah.

The chronicler's history of the reign of Hezekiah further illustrates his indifference to the prophets whose writings are extant. In the book of Kings great prominence is given to Isaiah. In the account of Sennacherib's invasion his messages to Hezekiah are given at considerable length.[1] He announces to the king his approaching death and Jehovah's gracious answers to Hezekiah's prayer for a respite and his request for a sign. When Hezekiah, in his pride of wealth, displayed his treasures to the Babylonian ambassadors, Isaiah brought the message of Divine rebuke and judgment. Chronicles characteristically devotes three long chapters to ritual and Levites, and dismisses Isaiah in half a sentence: "And Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this"—*i.e.*, the threatening language of Sennacherib—"and cried to Heaven."[2] In the accounts of Hezekiah's sickness and recovery and of the Babylonian embassy the references to Isaiah are entirely omitted. These omissions may be due to lack of space, so much of which had been devoted to the Levites that there was none to spare for the prophet.

[1] 2 Kings xix. 5–7, 20–34. [2] xxxii. 20.

Indeed, at the very point where prophecy began to exercise a controlling influence over the religion of Judah the chronicler's interest in the subject altogether flags. He tells us that Jehovah spake to Manasseh and to his people, and refers to "the words of the seers that spake to him in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel";[1] but he names no prophet and does not record the terms of any Divine message. In the case of Manasseh his sources may have failed him, but we have seen that in Hezekiah's reign he deliberately passes over most of the references to Isaiah.

The chronicler's narrative of Josiah's reign adheres more closely to the book of Kings. He reproduces the mission from the king to the prophetess Huldah and her Divine message of present forbearance and future judgment. The other prophet of this reign is the heathen king Pharaoh Necho, through whose mouth the Divine warning is given to Josiah. Jeremiah is only mentioned as lamenting over the last good king.[2] In the parallel text of this passage in the apocryphal book of Esdras Pharaoh's remonstrance is given in a somewhat expanded form; but the editor of Esdras shrank from making the heathen king the mouthpiece of Jehovah. While Chronicles tells us that Josiah "hearkened not unto the words of Neco from the mouth of God," Esdras, glaringly inconsistent both with the context and the history, tells us that he did not regard "the words of the prophet Jeremiah spoken by the mouth of the Lord."[3] This amended statement is borrowed from the chronicler's account of Zedekiah, who "humbled not himself before Jeremiah

[1] xxxiii. 10, 18.

[2] xxxv. 21, 22, 25, peculiar to Chronicles.

[3] 1 Esdras i. 28.

the prophet, speaking from the mouth of Jehovah." But this king was not alone in his disobedience. As the inevitable ruin of Jerusalem drew near, the whole nation, priests and people alike, sank deeper and deeper in sin. In these last days, "where sin abounded, grace did yet more abound." Jehovah exhausted the resources of His mercy: "Jehovah, the God of their fathers, sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling-place." It was all in vain: "They mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people, till there was no remedy." There are two other references in the concluding paragraphs of Chronicles to the prophecies of Jeremiah; but the history of prophecy in Judah closes with this last great unavailing manifestation of prophetic activity.

Before considering the general idea of the prophet that may be collected from the various notices in Chronicles, we may devote a little space to the chronicler's curious attitude towards our canonical prophets. For the most part he simply follows the book of Kings in making no reference to them; but his almost entire silence as to Isaiah suggests that his imitation of his authority in other cases is deliberate and intentional, especially as we find him inserting one or two references to Jeremiah not taken from the book of Kings. The chronicler had much more opportunity of using the canonical prophets than the author or authors of the book of Kings. The latter wrote before Hebrew literature had been collected and edited; but the chronicler had access to all the literature of the monarchy, Captivity, and even later times. His numerous extracts from almost the entire range of the Historical

Books, together with the Pentateuch and Psalms, show that his plan included the use of various sources, and that he had both the means and ability to work out his plan. He makes two references to Haggai and Zechariah,[1] so that if he ignores Amos, Hosea, and Micah, and all but ignores Isaiah, we can only conclude that he does so of set purpose. Hosea and Amos might be excluded on account of their connection with the northern kingdom; possibly the strictures of Isaiah and Micah on the priesthood and ritual made the chronicler unwilling to give them special prominence. Such an attitude on the part of a typical representative of the prevailing school of religious thought has an important bearing on the textual and other criticism of the early prophets. If they were neglected by the authorities of the Temple in the interval between Ezra and the Maccabees, the possibility of late additions and alterations is considerably increased.

Let us now turn to the picture of the prophets drawn for us by the chronicler. Both prophet and priest are religious personages, otherwise they differ widely in almost every particular; we cannot even speak of them as both holding religious offices. The term "office" has to be almost unjustifiably strained in order to apply it to the prophet, and to use it thus without explanation would be misleading. The qualifications, status, duties, and rewards of the priests are all fully prescribed by rigid and elaborate rules; but the prophets were the children of the Spirit: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the

[1] Ezra v. 1; vi. 14.

Spirit." The priest was bound to be a physically perfect male of the house of Aaron; the prophet might be of any tribe and of either sex. The warlike Deborah found a more peaceful successor in Josiah's counsellor Huldah, and among the degenerate prophets of Nehemiah's time a prophetess Noadiah[1] is specially mentioned. The priestly or Levitical office did not exclude its holder from the prophetic vocation. The Levite Jahaziel delivered the message of Jehovah to Jehoshaphat; and the prophet Zechariah, whom Joash put to death, was the son of the high-priest Jehoiada, and therefore himself a priest. Indeed, upon occasion the prophetic gift was exercised by those whom we should scarcely call prophets at all. Pharaoh Necho's warning to Jehoshaphat is exactly parallel to the prophetic exhortations addressed to other kings. In the crisis of David's fortunes at Ziklag, when Judah and Benjamin came out to meet him with apparently doubtful intentions, their adhesion to the future king was decided by a prophetic word given to the mighty warrior Amasai: "Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, who was one of the thirty, and he said, Thine are we, David, and on thy side, thou son of Jesse: peace, peace, be unto thee, and peace be to thine helpers; for thy God helpeth thee."[2] In view of this wide distribution of the prophetic gift, we are not surprised to find it frequently exercised by the pious kings. They receive and communicate to the nation direct intimations of the Divine will. David gives to Solomon and the people the instructions which God has given him with regard to the Temple; God's promises are personally addressed to Solomon, without the intervention of either

[1] Neh. vi. 14. [2] 1 Chron. xii. 18, peculiar to Chronicles.

prophet or priest; Abijah rebukes and exhorts Jeroboam and the Israelites very much as other prophets address the wicked kings; the speeches of Hezekiah and Josiah might equally well have been delivered by one of the prophets. David indeed is expressly called a prophet by St. Peter[1]; and though the immediate reference is to the Psalms, the chronicler's history both of David and of other kings gives them a valid claim to rank as prophets.

The authority and status of the prophets rested on no official or material conditions, such as hedged in the priestly office on every side. Accordingly their ancestry, previous history, and social standing are matters with which the historian has no concern. If the prophet happens also to be a priest or Levite, the chronicler, of course, knows and records his genealogy. It was essential that the genealogy of a priest should be known, but there are no genealogies of the prophets; their order was like that of Melchizedek, standing on the page of history "without father, without mother, without genealogy"; they appear abruptly, with no personal introduction, they deliver their message, and then disappear with equal abruptness. Sometimes not even their names are given. They had the one qualification compared with which birth and sex, rank and reputation, were trivial and meaningless things. The living word of Jehovah was on their lips; the power of His Spirit controlled their hearers; messenger and message were alike their own credentials. The supreme religious authority of the prophet testified to the subordinate and accidental character of all rites and symbols. On the other hand, the combination of

[1] Acts ii. 30.

priest and prophet in the same system proved the loftiest spirituality, the most emphatic recognition of the direct communion of the soul with God, to be consistent with an elaborate and rigid system of ritual. The services and ministry of the Temple were like lamps whose flame showed pale and dim when earth and heaven were lit up by the lightnings of prophetic inspiration.

The gifts and functions of the prophets did not lend themselves to any regular discipline or organisation; but we can roughly distinguish between two classes of prophets. One class seem to have exercised their gifts more systematically and continuously than others. Gad and Nathan, Isaiah and Jeremiah, became practically the domestic chaplains and spiritual advisers of David, Hezekiah, and the last kings of Judah. Others are only mentioned as delivering a single message; their ministry seems to have been occasional, perhaps confined to a single period of their lives. The Divine Spirit was free to take the whole life or to take a part only; He was not to be conditioned even by gifts of His own bestowal.

Human organisation naturally attempted to classify the possessors of the prophetic gift, to set them apart as a regular order, perhaps even to provide them with a suitable training, and, still more impossible task, to select the proper recipients of the gift and to produce and foster the prophetic inspiration. We read elsewhere of "schools of the prophets" and "sons of the prophets." The chronicler omits all reference to such institutions or societies; he declines to assign them any place in the prophetic succession in Israel. The gift of prophecy was absolutely dependent on the Divine will, and could not be claimed as a necessary appur-

tenance of the royal court at Jerusalem or a regular order in the kingdom of Judah. The priests are included in the list of David's ministers, but not the prophets Gad and Nathan. Abijah mentions among the special privileges of Judah "priests ministering unto Jehovah, even the sons of Aaron and the Levites in their work"; it does not occur to him to name prophets among the regular and permanent ministers of Jehovah.

The chronicler, in fact, does not recognise the professional prophet. The fifty sons of the prophets that watched Elisha divide the waters in the name of the God of Elijah were no more prophets for him than the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah that ate at Jezebel's table. The true prophet, like Amos, need not be either a prophet or the son of a prophet in the professional sense. Long before the chronicler's time the history and teaching of the great prophets had clearly established the distinction between the professional prophet, who was appointed by man or by himself, and the inspired messenger, who received a direct commission from Jehovah.

In describing the prophet's sole qualification we have also stated his function. He was the messenger of Jehovah, and declared His will. The priest in his ministrations represented Israel before God, and in a measure represented God to Israel. The rites and ceremonies over which he presided symbolised the permanent and unchanging features of man's religious experience and the eternal righteousness and mercy of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. From generation to generation men received the good gifts of God, and brought the offerings of their gratitude; they sinned against God and came to seek

forgiveness; and the house of Aaron met them generation after generation in the same priestly robes, with the same rites, in the one Temple, in token of the unchanging willingness of Jehovah to accept and forgive His children.

The prophet, too, represented God to man; his words were the words of God; through him the Divine presence and the Divine Spirit exerted their influence over the hearts and consciences of his hearers. But while the priestly ministrations symbolised the fixity and permanence of God's eternal majesty, the prophets expressed the infinite variety of His Divine nature and its continual adaptation to all the changes of human life. They came to the individual and to the nation in each crisis of history with the Divine message that enabled them to suit themselves to altered circumstances, to grapple with new difficulties, and to solve new problems. The priest and the prophet together set forth the great paradox that the unchanging God is the source of all change.

"Lord God, by whom all change is wrought,
By whom new things to birth are brought,
In whom no change is known,
* * * * * *
To Thee we rise, in Thee we rest;
We stay at home, we go in quest,
Still Thou art our abode:
The rapture swells, the wonder grows,
As full on us new life still flows
From our unchanging God."

The prophetic utterances recorded by the chronicler illustrate the work of the prophets in delivering the message that met the present needs of the people. There is nothing in Chronicles to encourage the unspiritual notion that the main object of prophecy

was to give exact and detailed information as to the remote future. There is prediction necessarily: it was impossible to declare the will of God without stating the punishment of sin and the victory of righteousness; but prediction is only part of the declaration of God's will. In Gad and Nathan prophecy appears as a means of communication between the inquiring soul and God; it does not, indeed, gratify curiosity, but rather gives guidance in perplexity and distress. The later prophets constantly intervene to initiate reform or to hinder the carrying out of an evil policy. Gad and Nathan lent their authority to David's organisation of the Temple music; Asa's reform originated in the exhortation of Oded the prophet; Jehoshaphat went out to meet the Moabite and Ammonite invaders in response to the inspiriting utterance of Jahaziel the Levite; Josiah consulted the prophetess Huldah before carrying out his reformation; the chiefs of Ephraim sent back the Jewish captives in obedience to another Oded. On the other hand, Shemaiah prevented Rehoboam from fighting against Israel; Micaiah warned Ahab and Jehoshaphat not to go up against Ramoth-gilead.

Often, however, the prophetic message gives the interpretation of history, the Divine judgment upon conduct, with its sentence of punishment or reward. Hanani the seer, for instance, comes to Asa to show him the real value of his apparently satisfactory alliance with Benhadad, king of Syria: "Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and hast not relied on Jehovah thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand. . . . Herein thou hast done foolishly; for from henceforth thou shalt have wars." Jehoshaphat is told why his ships were broken: "Because thou hast joined thyself with

Ahaziah, Jehovah hath destroyed thy works." Thus the prophetic declaration of Divine judgment came to mean almost exclusively rebuke and condemnation. The witness of a good conscience may be left to speak for itself; God does not often need to send a prophet to His obedient servants in order to signify His approval of their righteous acts. But the censures of conscience need both the stimulus of external suggestion and the support of external authority. Upon the prophets was constantly laid the unwelcome task of rousing and bracing the conscience for its stern duty. They became the heralds of Divine wrath, the precursors of national misfortune. Often, too, the warnings that should have saved the people were neglected or resented, and thus became the occasion of new sin and severer punishment. We must not, however, lay too much stress on this aspect of the prophets' work. They were no mere Cassandras, announcing inevitable ruin at the hands of a blind destiny; they were not always, or even chiefly, the messengers of coming doom. If they declared the wrath of God, they also vindicated His justice; in the day of the Lord which they so often foretold, mercy and grace tempered and at last overcame judgment. They taught, even in their sternest utterances, the moral government of the world and the benevolent purpose of its Ruler. These are man's only hope, even in his sin and suffering, the only ground for effort, and the only comfort in misfortune.

There are, however, one or two elements in the chronicler's notices of the prophets that scarcely harmonise with this general picture. The scanty references of the books of Samuel and Kings to the "schools" and sons of the prophets have suggested the theory that the prophets were the guardians of national educa-

tion, culture, and literature. The chronicler expressly assigns the function to the Levites, and does not recognise that the "schools of the prophets" had any permanent significance for the religion of Israel, possibly because they chiefly appear in connection with the northern kingdom. At the same time, we find this idea of the literary character of the prophets in Chronicles in a new form. The authorities referred to in the subscriptions to each reign bear the names of the prophets who flourished during the reign. The primary significance of the tradition followed by the chronicler is the supreme importance of the prophet for his period; he, and not the king, gives it a distinctive character. Therefore the prophet gives his name to his period, as the consuls at Rome, the Archon Basileus at Athens, and the Assyrian priests gave their own names to their year of office. Probably by the time Chronicles was written the view had been adopted which we know prevailed later on, and it was supposed that the prophets wrote the Historical Books which bore their names. The ancient prophets had given the Divine interpretation of the course of events and pronounced the Divine judgment on history. The Historical Books were written for religious edification; they contained a similar interpretation and judgment. The religious instincts of later Judaism rightly classed them with the prophetic Scriptures.

The striking contrast we have been able to trace between the priests and the prophets in their qualifications and duties extends also to their rewards. The book of Kings gives us glimpses of the way in which the reverent gratitude of the people made some provision for the maintenance of the prophets. We are all familiar with the hospitality of the Shunammite, and

we read how "a man from Baal-shalishah" brought first-fruits to Elisha.[1] But the chronicler omits all such references as being connected with the northern kingdom, and does not give us any similar information as to the prophets of Judah. He is not usually indifferent as to ways and means. He devotes some space to the revenues of the kings of Judah, and delights to dwell on the sources of priestly income. But it never seems to occur to him that the prophets have any wants to be provided for. To use George Macdonald's phrase, he is quite content to leave them "on the lily and sparrow footing." The priesthood and the Levites must be richly endowed; the honour of Israel and of Jehovah is concerned in their having cities, tithes, first-fruits, and offerings. Prophets are sent to reproach the people when the priestly dues are withheld; but for themselves the prophets might have said with St. Paul, "We seek not yours, but you." No one supposed that the authority and dignity of the prophets needed to be supported by ecclesiastical status, splendid robes, and great incomes. Spiritual force so manifestly resided in them that they could afford to dispense with the most impressive symbols of power and authority. On the other hand, they received an honour that was never accorded to the priesthood: they suffered persecution for the cause of Jehovah. Zechariah the son of Jehoiada was put to death, and Micaiah the son of Imlah was imprisoned. We are never told that the priest as priest suffered persecution. Ahaz closed the Temple, Manasseh set up an idol in the house of God, but we do not read of either Ahaz or Manasseh that they slew the priests of Jehovah. The teaching

[1] 2 Kings iv. 42.

of the prophets was direct and personal, and thus eminently calculated to excite resentment and provoke persecution; the priestly services, however, did not at all interfere with concurrent idolatry, and the priests were accustomed to receive and execute the orders of the kings. There is nothing to suggest that they sought to obtrude the worship of Jehovah upon unwilling converts; and it is not improbable that some, at any rate, of the priests allowed themselves to be made the tools of the wicked kings. On the eve of the Captivity we read that "the chiefs of the priests and the people trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the heathen, and they polluted the house of Jehovah." No such disloyalty is recorded of the prophets in Chronicles. The most splendid incomes cannot purchase loyalty. It is still true that "the hireling fleeth because he is a hireling"; men's most passionate devotion is for the cause in which they have suffered.

We have seen that the modern ministry presents certain parallels to the ancient priesthood. Where are we to look for an analogue to the prophet? If the minister be, in a sense, a priest when he leads the worship of the people, is he also a prophet when he preaches to them? Preaching is intended to be—perhaps we may venture to say that it mostly is—a declaration of the will of God. Moreover, it is not the exposition of a fixed and unchangeable ritual or even of a set of rigid theological formulæ. The preacher, like the prophet, seeks to meet the demands for new light that are made by constantly changing circumstances; he seeks to adapt the eternal truth to the varying needs of individual lives. So far he is a prophet, but the essential qualifications of the prophet are still to be

sought after. Isaiah and Jeremiah did not declare the word of Jehovah as they had learnt it from a Bible or any other book, nor yet according to the traditions of a school or the teaching of great authorities; such declaration might be made by the scribes and rabbis in later times. But the prophets of Chronicles received their message from Jehovah Himself; while they mused upon the needs of the people, the fire of inspiration burned within them; then they spoke. Moreover, like their great antitype, they spoke with authority, and not as the scribes; their words carried with them conviction even when they did not produce obedience. The reality of men's conviction of their Divine authority was shown by the persecution to which they were subjected. Are these tokens of the prophet also the notes of the Christian ministry of preaching? Prophets were found among the house of Aaron and from the tribe of Levi, but not every Levite or priest was a prophet. Every branch of the Christian Church has numbered among its official ministers men who delivered their message with an inspired conviction of its truth; in them the power and presence of the Spirit have compelled a belief in their authority to speak for God: this belief has received the twofold attestation of hearts and consciences submitted to the Divine will on the one hand or of bitter and rancorous hostility on the other. In every Church we find the record of men who have spoken, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Spirit teacheth." Such were Wyclif and Latimer, Calvin and Luther, George Whitefield and the Wesleys; such, too, were Moffat and Livingstone. Nor need we suppose that in the modern Christian Church the gift of prophecy has been confined to men of brilliant genius who have

been conspicuously successful. In the sacred canon Haggai and Obadiah stand side by side with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The chronicler recognises the prophetic calling of men too obscure to be mentioned by name. He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, not necessarily the orator whom men crowd to hear and whose name is recorded in history; and God giveth not the Spirit by measure. Many of the least distinguished of His servants are truly His prophets, speaking, by the conviction He has given them, a message which comes home with power to some hearts at any rate, and is a savour of life unto life and of death unto death. The seals of their ministry are to be found in redeemed and purified lives, and also only too often in the bitter and vindictive ill-will of those whom their faithfulness has offended.

We naturally expect to find that the official ministry affords the most suitable sphere for the exercise of the gift of prophecy. Those who are conscious of a Divine message will often seek the special opportunities which the ministry affords. But our study of Chronicles reminds us that the vocation of the prophet cannot be limited to any external organisation; it was not confined to the official ministry of Israel; it cannot be conditioned by recognition by bishops, presbyteries, conferences, or Churches; it will often find its only external credential in a gracious influence over individual lives. Nay, the prophet may have his Divine vocation and be entirely rejected of men. In Chronicles we find prophets, like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, whose one Divine message is received with scorn and defiance.

In practice, if not in theory, the Churches have long

since recognised that the prophetic gift is found outside any official ministry, and that they may be taught the will of God by men and women of all ranks and callings. They have provided opportunities for the free exercise of such gifts in lay preaching, missions, Sunday-schools, meetings of all kinds.

We have here stumbled upon another modern controversy: the desirability of women preaching. Chronicles mentions prophetesses as well as prophets; on the other hand, there were no Jewish priestesses. The modern minister combines some priestly duties with the opportunity, at least, of exercising the gift of prophecy. The mention of only two or three prophetesses in the Old Testament shows that the possession of the gift by women was exceptional. These few instances, however, are sufficient to prove that God did not in old times limit the gift to men; they suggest at any rate the possibility of its being possessed by women now, and when women have a Divine message the Church will not venture to quench the Spirit. Of course the application of these broad principles would have to be adapted to the circumstances of individual Churches. Huldah, for instance, is not described as delivering any public address to the people; the king sent his ministers to consult her in her own house. Whatever hesitation may be felt about the public ministry of women, no one will question their Divine commission to carry the messages of God to the bedsides of the sick and the homes of the poor. Most of us have known women to whom men have gone, as Josiah's ministers went to Huldah, to "inquire of the Lord."

Another practical question, the payment of the ministers of religion, has already been raised by the

chronicler's account of the revenues of the priests. What more do we learn on the subject from his silence as to the maintenance of the prophets? The silence is, of course, eloquent as to the extent to which even a pious Levite may be preoccupied with his own worldly interests and quite indifferent to other people's; but it would not have been possible if the idea of revenues and endowments for the prophets had ever been very familiar to men's minds. It has been said that to-day the prophet sells his inspiration, but the gift of God can no more be bought and sold with money now than in ancient Israel. The purely spiritual character of true prophecy, its entire dependence on Divine inspiration, makes it impossible to hire a prophet at a fixed salary regulated by the quality and extent of his gifts. By the grace of God, there is an intimate practical connection between the work of the official ministry and the inspired declaration of the Divine will; and this connection has its bearing upon the payment of ministers. Men's gratitude is stirred when they have received comfort and help through the spiritual gifts of their minister, but in principle there is no connection between the gift of prophecy and the payment of the ministry. A Church can purchase the enjoyment of eloquence, learning, intellect, and industry; a high character has a pecuniary value for ecclesiastical as well as for commercial purposes. The prophet may be provided with leisure, society, and literature so that the Divine message may be delivered in its most attractive form; he may be installed in a large and well-appointed building, so that he may have the best possible opportunity of delivering his message; he will naturally receive a larger income when he surrenders obscure and limited opportunities to

minister in some more suitable sphere. But when we have said all, it is still only the accessories that have to do with payment, not the Divine gift of prophecy itself. When the prophet's message is not comforting, when his words grate upon the theological and social prejudices of his hearers, especially when he is invited to curse and is Divinely compelled to bless, there is no question of payment for such ministry. It has been said of Christ, "For the minor details necessary to secure respect, and obedience, and the enthusiasm of the vulgar, for the tact, the finesse, the compromising faculty, the judicious ostentation of successful politicians —for these arts He was not prepared."[1] Those who imitate their Master often share His reward.

The slight and accidental connection of the payment of ministers with their prophetic gifts is further illustrated by the free exercise of such gifts by men and women who have no ecclesiastical status and do not seek any material reward. Here again any exact adoption of ancient methods is impossible; we may accept from the chronicler the great principle that loyal believers will make all adequate provision for the service and work of Jehovah, and that they will be prepared to honour Him in the persons of those whom they choose to represent them before Him, and also of those whom they recognise as delivering to them His messages. On the other hand, the prophet—and for our present purpose we may extend the term to the humblest and least gifted Christian who in any way seeks to speak for Christ—the prophet speaks by the impulse of the Spirit and from no meaner motive.

With regard to the functions of the prophet, the

[1] Abbott, *Through Nature to Christ*, p. 295.

Spirit is as entirely free to dictate His own message as He is to choose His own messenger. The chronicler's prophets were concerned with foreign politics—alliances with Syria and Assyria, wars with Egypt and Samaria—as well as with the ritual of the Temple and the worship of Jehovah. They discerned a religious significance in the purely secular matter of a census. Jehovah had His purposes for the civil government and international policy of Israel as well as for its creed and services. If we lay down the principle that politics, whether local or national, are to be kept out of the pulpit, we must either exclude from the official ministry all who possess any measure of the prophetic gift, or else carefully stipulate that, if they be conscious of any obligation to declare the Lord's will in matters of public righteousness, they shall find some more suitable place than the Lord's house and some more suitable time than the Lord's day. When we suggest that the prophet should mind his own business by confining himself to questions of doctrine, worship, and the religious experiences of the individual, we are in danger of denying God's right to a voice in social and national affairs.

Turning, however, to more directly ecclesiastical affairs, we have noted that Asa's reformation received its first impulse from the utterances of the prophet Azariah or Oded, and also that one feature of the prophet's work is to provide for the fresh needs developed by changing circumstances. A priesthood or any other official ministry is often wanting in elasticity; it is necessarily attached to an established organisation and trammelled by custom and tradition. The Holy Spirit in all ages has commissioned prophets as the free agents in new movements in the Divine government of the world.

They may be ecclesiastics, like many of the Reformers and like the Wesleys; but they are not dominated by the official spirit. The initial impulse that moves such men is partly one of recoil from their environment; and the environment in return casts them out. Again, prophets may become ecclesiastics, like the tinker to whom English-speaking Christians owe one of their great religious classics and the cobbler who stirred up the Churches to missionary enthusiasm. Or they may remain from beginning to end without official status in any Church, like the apostle of the anti-slavery movement. In any case the impulse to a larger, purer, and nobler standard of life than that consecrated by long usage and ancient tradition does not come from the ecclesiastical official because of his official training and experience; the living waters that go out of Jerusalem in the day of the Lord are too wide, and deep, and strong to flow in the narrow rock-hewn aqueducts of tradition: they make new channels for themselves; and these channels are the men who do not demand that the Spirit shall speak according to familiar formulæ and stereotyped ideas, but are willing to be the prophets of strange and even uncongenial truth. Or, to use the great metaphor of St. John's Gospel, with such men, both for themselves and for others, the water that the Lord gives them becomes a well of water springing up unto eternal life.

But the chronicler's picture of the work of the prophets has its darker side. Few were privileged to give the signal for an immediate and happy reformation. Most of the prophets were charged with messages of rebuke and condemnation, so that they were ready to cry out with Jeremiah, "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife and

a man of contention to the whole earth! I have not lent on usury, neither have men lent to me on usury, yet every one of them doth curse me."[1]

Perhaps even to-day the prophetic spirit often charges its possessors with equally unwelcome duties. We trust that the Christian conscience is more sensitive than that of ancient Israel, and that the Church is more ready to profit by the warnings addressed to it; but the response to the sterner teaching of the Spirit is not always accompanied by a kindly feeling towards the teacher, and even where there is progress, the progress is slow compared to the eager longing of the prophet for the spiritual growth of his hearers. And yet the sequel of the chronicler's history suggests some relief to the gloomier side of the picture. Prophet after prophet utters his unavailing and seemingly useless rebuke, and delivers his announcement of coming ruin, and at last the ruin falls upon the nation. But that is not the end. Before the chronicler wrote there had arisen a restored Israel, purified from idolatry and delivered from many of its former troubles. The Restoration was only rendered possible through the continued testimony of the prophets to the Lord and His righteousness. However barren of immediate results such testimony may seem to-day, it is still the word of the Lord that cannot return unto Him void, but shall accomplish that which He pleaseth and shall prosper in the thing whereto He sent it.

The chronicler's conception of the prophetic character of the historian, whereby his narrative sets forth God's will and interprets His purposes, is not altogether popular at present. The teleological view of history is

[1] Jer. xv. 10

somewhat at a discount. Yet the prophetic method, so to speak, of Carlyle and Ruskin is largely historical; and even in so unlikely a quarter as the works of George Eliot we can find an example of didactic history. *Romola* is largely taken up with the story of Savonarola, told so as to bring out its religious significance. But teleological history is sometimes a failure even from the standpoint of the Christian student, because it defeats its own ends. He who is bent on deducing lessons from history may lay undue stress on part of its significance and obscure the rest. The historian is perhaps most a prophet when he leaves history to speak for itself. In this sense, we may venture to attribute a prophetic character to purely scientific history; accurate and unbiassed narrative is the best starting-point for the study of the religious significance of the course of events.

In concluding our inquiry as to how far modern Church life is illustrated by the work of the prophets, one is tempted to dwell for a moment on the methods they did not use and the subjects not dealt with in their utterances. This theme, however, scarcely belongs to the exposition of Chronicles; it would be more appropriate to a complete examination of the history and writings of the prophets. One point, however, may be noticed. Their utterances in Chronicles lay less direct stress on moral considerations than the writings of the canonical prophets, not because of any indifference to morality, but because, seen in the distance of a remote past, all other sins seemed to be summed up in faithlessness to Jehovah. Perhaps we may see in this a suggestion of a final judgment of history, which should be equally instructive to the religious man who has any inclination to disparage

morality and to the moral man who wishes to ignore religion.

Our review and discussion of the varied references of Chronicles to the prophets brings home to us with fresh force the keen interest felt in them by the chronicler and the supreme importance he attached to their work. The reverent homage of a Levite of the second Temple centuries after the golden age of prophecy is an eloquent testimony to the unique position of the prophets in Israel. His treatment of the subject shows that the lofty ideal of their office and mission had lost nothing in the course of the development of Judaism; his selection from the older material emphasises the independence of the true prophet of any professional status or consideration of material reward; his sense of the importance of the prophets to the State and Church in Judah is an encouragement to those "who look for redemption in Jerusalem," and who trust the eternal promise of God that in all times of His people's need He "will raise up a prophet from among their brethren, . . . and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command them."[1] "The memorial of the prophets was blessed, . . . for they comforted Jacob, and delivered them by assured hope."[2] Many prophets of the Church have also left a blessed memorial of comfort and deliverance, and God ever renews this more than apostolic succession.

[1] Deut. xviii. 18. [2] Ecclus. xlix. 10.

CHAPTER X

SATAN

1 CHRON. xxi.-xxii. 1.

"And again the anger of Jehovah was kindled against Israel, and He moved David against them saying, Go, number Israel and Judah." —2 SAM. xxiv. 1.

"And Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel."—1 CHRON. xxi. 1.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempteth no man: but each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed."—JAMES i. 13, 14.

THE census of David is found both in the book of Samuel and in Chronicles, in very much the same form; but the chronicler has made a number of small but important alterations and additions. Taken together, these changes involve a new interpretation of the history, and bring out lessons that cannot so easily be deduced from the narrative in the book of Samuel. Hence it is necessary to give a separate exposition of the narrative in Chronicles.

As before, we will first review the alterations made by the chronicler and then expound the narrative in the form in which it left his hand, or rather in the form in which it stands in the Masoretic text. Any attempt to deal with the peculiarly complicated problem of the textual criticism of Chronicles would be out of

place here. Probably there are no corruptions of the text that would appreciably affect the general exposition of this chapter.

At the very outset the chronicler substitutes Satan for Jehovah, and thus changes the whole significance of the narrative. This point is too important to be dealt with casually, and must be reserved for special consideration later on. In ver. 2 there is a slight change that marks the different points of the views of the Chronicler and the author of the narrative in the book of Samuel. The latter had written that Joab numbered the people from Dan to Beersheba, a merely conventional phrase indicating the extent of the census. It might possibly, however, have been taken to denote that the census began in the north and was concluded in the south. To the chronicler, whose interests all centred in Judah, such an arrangement seemed absurd; and he carefully guarded against any mistake by altering "Dan to Beersheba" into "Beersheba to Dan." In ver. 3 the substance of Joab's words is not altered, but various slight touches are added to bring out more clearly and forcibly what is implied in the book of Samuel. Joab had spoken of the census as being the king's pleasure.[1] It was scarcely appropriate to speak of David "taking pleasure in" a suggestion of Satan. In Chronicles Joab's words are less forcible, "Why doth my lord require this thing?" Again, in the book of Samuel Joab protests against the census without assigning any reason. The context, it is true, readily supplies one; but in Chronicles all is made clear by the addition, "Why will he" (David) "be a cause of guilt unto Israel?" Further on the chronicler's special

[1] R.V. "delight in" is somewhat too strong.

interest in Judah again betrays itself. The book of Samuel described, with some detail, the progress of the enumerators through Eastern and Northern Palestine by way of Beersheba to Jerusalem. Chronicles having already made them start from Beersheba, omits these details.

In ver. 5 the numbers in Chronicles differ not only from those of the older narrative, but also from the chronicler's own statistics in chap. xxvii. In this last account the men of war are divided into twelve courses of twenty-four thousand each, making a total of two hundred and eighty-eight thousand; in the book of Samuel Israel numbers eight hundred thousand, and Judah five hundred thousand; but in our passage Israel is increased to eleven hundred thousand, and Judah is reduced to four hundred and seventy thousand. Possibly the statistics in chap. xxvii. are not intended to include all the fighting men, otherwise the figures cannot be harmonised. The discrepancy between our passage and the book of Samuel is perhaps partly explained by the following verse, which is an addition of the chronicler. In the book of Samuel the census is completed, but our additional verse states that Levi and Benjamin were not included in the census. The chronicler understood that the five hundred thousand assigned to Judah in the older narrative were the joint total of Judah and Benjamin; he accordingly reduced the total by thirty thousand, because, according to his view, Benjamin was omitted from the census. The increase in the number of the Israelites is unexpected. The chronicler does not usually overrate the northern tribes. Later on Jeroboam, eighteen years after the disruption, takes the field against Abijah with "eight hundred thousand

chosen men," a phrase that implies a still larger number of fighting men, if all had been mustered. Obviously the rebel king would not be expected to be able to bring into the field as large a force as the entire strength of Israel in the most flourishing days of David. The chronicler's figures in these two passages are consistent, but the comparison is not an adequate reason for the alteration in the present chapter. Textual corruption is always a possibility in the case of numbers, but on the whole this particular change does not admit of a satisfactory explanation.

In ver. 7 we have a very striking alteration. According to the book of Samuel, David's repentance was entirely spontaneous: "David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people"[1]; but here God smites Israel, and then David's conscience awakes. In ver. 12 the chronicler makes a slight addition, apparently to gratify his literary taste. In the original narrative the third alternative offered to David had been described simply as "the pestilence," but in Chronicles the words "the sword of Jehovah" are added in antithesis to "the sword of Thine enemies" in the previous verse.

Ver. 16, which describes David's vision of the angel with the drawn sword, is an expansion of the simple statement of the book of Samuel that David saw the angel. In ver. 18 we are not merely told that Gad spake to David, but that he spake by the command of the angel of Jehovah. Ver. 20, which tells us how Ornan saw the angel, is an addition of the chronicler's. All these changes lay stress upon the intervention of the angel, and illustrate the interest

[1] It is, however, possible that the text in Samuel is a corruption of text more closely parallel to that of Chronicles.

taken by Judaism in the ministry of angels. Zechariah, the prophet of the Restoration, received his messages by the dispensation of angels; and the title of the last canonical prophet, Malachi, probably means "the Angel." The change from Araunah to Ornan is a mere question of spelling. Possibly Ornan is a somewhat Hebraised form of the older Jebusite name Araunah.

In ver. 22 the reference to "a full price" and other changes in the form of David's words are probably due to the influence of Gen. xxiii. 9. In ver. 23 the chronicler's familiarity with the ritual of sacrifice has led him to insert a reference to a meal offering, to accompany the burnt offering. Later on the chronicler omits the somewhat ambiguous words which seem to speak of Araunah as a king. He would naturally avoid anything like a recognition of the royal status of a Jebusite prince.

In ver. 25 David pays much more dearly for Ornan's threshing-floor than in the book of Samuel. In the latter the price is fifty shekels of silver, in the former six hundred shekels of gold. Most ingenious attempts have been made to harmonise the two statements. It has been suggested that fifty shekels of silver means silver to the value of fifty shekels of gold and paid in gold, and that six hundred shekels of gold means the value of six hundred shekels of silver paid in gold. A more lucid but equally impossible explanation is that David paid fifty shekels for every tribe, six hundred in all.[1] The real reason for the change is that when the Temple became supremely important to the Jews the small price of fifty shekels for the site seemed derogatory to the dignity of the sanctuary; six

[1] Noldius and R. Salom. *apud* Bertheau i. 1.

hundred shekels of gold was a more appropriate sum. Abraham had paid four hundred shekels for a burying-place; and a site for the Temple, where Jehovah had chosen to put His name, must surely have cost more. The chronicler followed the tradition which had grown up under the influence of this feeling.

Chaps. xxi. 27–xxii. 1 are an addition. According to the Levitical law, David was falling into grievous sin in sacrificing anywhere except before the Mosaic altar of burnt offering. The chronicler therefore states the special circumstances that palliated this offence against the exclusive privileges of the one sanctuary of Jehovah. He also reminds us that this threshing-floor became the site of the altar of burnt offering for Solomon's temple. Here he probably follows an ancient and historical tradition; the prominence given to the threshing-floor in the book of Samuel indicates the special sanctity of the site. The Temple is the only sanctuary whose site could be thus connected with the last days of David. When the book of Samuel was written, the facts were too familiar to need any explanation; every one knew that the Temple stood on the site of Araunah's threshing-floor. The chronicler, writing centuries later, felt it necessary to make an explicit statement on the subject.

Having thus attempted to understand how our narrative assumed its present form, we will now tell the chronicler's story of these incidents. The long reign of David was drawing to a close. Hitherto he had been blessed with uninterrupted prosperity and success. His armies had been victorious over all the enemies of Israel, the borders of the land of Jehovah had been extended, David himself was lodged with princely splendour, and the services of the Ark were

conducted with imposing ritual by a numerous array of priests and Levites. King and people alike were at the zenith of their glory. In worldly prosperity and careful attention to religious observances David and his people were not surpassed by Job himself. Apparently their prosperity provoked the envious malice of an evil and mysterious being, who appears only here in Chronicles: Satan, the persecutor of Job. The trial to which he subjected the loyalty of David was more subtle and suggestive than his assault upon Job. He harassed Job as the wind dealt with the traveller in the fable, and Job only wrapped the cloak of his faith closer about him; Satan allowed David to remain in the full sunshine of prosperity, and seduced him into sin by fostering his pride in being the powerful and victorious prince of a mighty people. He suggested a census. David's pride would be gratified by obtaining accurate information as to the myriads of his subjects. Such statistics would be useful for the civil organisation of Israel; the king would learn where and how to recruit his army or to find an opportunity to impose additional taxation. The temptation appealed alike to the king, the soldier, and the statesman, and did not appeal in vain. David at once instructed Joab and the princes to proceed with the enumeration; Joab demurred and protested: the census would be a cause of guilt unto Israel. But not even the great influence of the commander-in-chief could turn the king from his purpose. His word prevailed against Joab, wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. This brief general statement indicates a long and laborious task, simplified and facilitated in some measure by the primitive organisation of society and

by rough and ready methods adopted to secure the very moderate degree of accuracy with which an ancient Eastern sovereign would be contented. When Xerxes wished to ascertain the number of the vast army with which he set out to invade Greece, his officers packed ten thousand men into as small a space as possible and built a wall round them; then they turned them out, and packed the space again and again; and so in time they ascertained how many tens of thousands of men there were in the army. Joab's methods would be different, but perhaps not much more exact. He would probably learn from the "heads of fathers' houses" the number of fighting men in each family. Where the hereditary chiefs of a district were indifferent, he might make some rough estimate of his own. We may be sure that both Joab and the local authorities would be careful to err on the safe side. The king was anxious to learn that he possessed a large number of subjects. Probably as the officers of Xerxes went on with their counting they omitted to pack the measured area as closely as they did at first; they might allow eight or nine thousand to pass for ten thousand. Similarly David's servants would, to say the least, be anxious not to underestimate the number of his subjects. The work apparently went on smoothly; nothing is said that indicates any popular objection or resistance to the census; the process of enumeration was not interrupted by any token of Divine displeasure against the "cause of guilt unto Israel." Nevertheless Joab's misgivings were not set at rest; he did what he could to limit the range of the census and to withdraw at least two of the tribes from the impending outbreak of Divine wrath. The tribe of Levi would be exempt from

taxation and the obligation of military service; Joab could omit them without rendering his statistics less useful for military and financial purposes. In not including the Levites in the general census of Israel, Joab was following the precedent set by the numbering in the wilderness.

Benjamin was probably omitted in order to protect the Holy City, the chronicler following that form of the ancient tradition which assigned Jerusalem to Benjamin.[1] Later on,[2] however, the chronicler seems to imply that these two tribes left to the last were not numbered because of the growing dissatisfaction of Joab with his task: "Joab the son of Zeruiah began to number, but finished not." But these different reasons for the omission of Levi and Benjamin do not mutually exclude each other. Another limitation is also stated in the later reference: "David took not the number of them twenty years old and under, because Jehovah had said that He would increase Israel like to the stars of heaven." This statement and explanation seems a little superfluous; the census was specially concerned with the fighting men, and in the book of Numbers only those over twenty are numbered. But we have seen elsewhere that the chronicler has no great confidence in the intelligence of his readers, and feels bound to state definitely matters that have only been implied and might be overlooked. Here, therefore, he calls our attention to the fact that the numbers previously given do not comprise the whole male population, but only the adults.

[1] Josh. xviii. 28; Judges i. 21, as against Josh. xv. 63; Judges i. 8, which assign the city to Judah.

[2] 1 Chron. xxvii. 23, 24.

At last the census, so far as it was carried out at all, was finished, and the results were presented to the king. They are meagre and bald compared to the volumes of tables which form the report of a modern census. Only two divisions of the country are recognised: "Judah" and "Israel," or the ten tribes. The total is given for each: eleven hundred thousand for Israel, four hundred and seventy thousand for Judah, in all fifteen hundred and seventy thousand. Whatever details may have been given to the king, he would be chiefly interested in the grand total. Its figures would be the most striking symbol of the extent of his authority and the glory of his kingdom.

Perhaps during the months occupied in taking the census David had forgotten the ineffectual protests of Joab, and was able to receive his report without any presentiment of coming evil. Even if his mind were not altogether at ease, all misgivings would for the time be forgotten. He probably made or had made for him some rough calculation as to the total of men, women, and children that would correspond to the vast array of fighting men. His servants would not reckon the entire population at less than nine or ten millions. His heart would be uplifted with pride as he contemplated the statement of the multitudes that were the subjects of his crown and prepared to fight at his bidding. The numbers are moderate compared with the vast populations and enormous armies of the great powers of modern Europe; they were far surpassed by the Roman empire and the teeming populations of the valleys of the Nile, the Euphrates, and the Tigris; but during the Middle Ages it was not often possible to find in Western Europe so large a population under one government or so numerous an army under one banner. The resources

of Cyrus may not have been greater when he started on his career of conquest; and when Xerxes gathered into one motley horde the warriors of half the known world, their total was only about double the number of David's robust and warlike Israelites. There was no enterprise that was likely to present itself to his imagination that he might not have undertaken with a reasonable probability of success. He must have regretted that his days of warfare were past, and that the unwarlike Solomon, occupied with more peaceful tasks, would allow this magnificent instrument of possible conquests to rust unused.

But the king was not long left in undisturbed enjoyment of his greatness. In the very moment of his exaltation, some sense of the Divine displeasure fell upon him.[1] Mankind has learnt by a long and sad experience to distrust its own happiness. The brightest hours have come to possess a suggestion of possible catastrophe, and classic story loved to tell of the unavailing efforts of fortunate princes to avoid their inevitable downfall. Polycrates and Crœsus, however, had not tempted the Divine anger by ostentatious pride; David's power and glory had made him neglectful of the reverent homage due to Jehovah, and he had sinned in spite of the express warnings of his most trusted minister.

When the revulsion of feeling came, it was complete. The king at once humbled himself under the mighty hand of God, and made full acknowledgment of his sin and folly: "I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing: but now put away, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly."

[1] Ver. 7 is apparently a general anticipation of the narrative in vv. 9-15.

The narrative continues as in the book of Samuel. Repentance could not avert punishment, and the punishment struck directly at David's pride of power and glory. The great population was to be decimated either by famine, war, or pestilence. The king chose to suffer from the pestilence, "the sword of Jehovah": "Let me fall now into the hand of Jehovah, for very great are His mercies; and let me not fall into the hand of man. So Jehovah sent a pestilence upon Israel, and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men." Not three days since Joab handed in his report, and already a deduction of seventy thousand would have to be made from its total; and still the pestilence was not checked, for "God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it." If, as we have supposed, Joab had withheld Jerusalem from the census, his pious caution was now rewarded: "Jehovah repented Him of the evil, and said to the destroying angel, It is enough; now stay thine hand." At the very last moment the crowning catastrophe was averted. In the Divine counsels Jerusalem was already delivered, but to human eyes its fate still trembled in the balance: "And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of Jehovah stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem." So another great Israelite soldier lifted up his eyes beside Jericho and beheld the captain of the host of Jehovah standing over against him with his sword drawn in his hand.[1] Then the sword was drawn to smite the enemies of Israel, but now it was turned to smite Israel itself. David and his elders fell upon their faces as Joshua had done before them: "And David said unto

[1] Josh. v. 13.

God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done very wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Thine hand, I pray Thee, O Jehovah my God, be against me and against my father's house, but not against Thy people, that they should be plagued."

The awful presence returned no answer to the guilty king, but addressed itself to the prophet Gad, and commanded *him* to bid David go up and build an altar to Jehovah in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. The command was a message of mercy. Jehovah permitted David to build Him an altar; He was prepared to accept an offering at his hands. The king's prayers were heard, and Jerusalem was saved from the pestilence. But still the angel stretched out his drawn sword over Jerusalem; he waited till the reconciliation of Jehovah with His people should have been duly ratified by solemn sacrifices. At the bidding of the prophet, David went up to the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Sorrow and reassurance, hope and fear, contended for the mastery. No sacrifice could call back to life the seventy thousand victims whom the pestilence had already destroyed, and yet the horror of its ravages was almost forgotten in relief at the deliverance of Jerusalem from the calamity that had all but overtaken it. Even now the uplifted sword might be only held back for a time; Satan might yet bring about some heedless and sinful act, and the respite might end not in pardon, but in the execution of God's purpose of vengeance. Saul had been condemned because he sacrificed too soon; now perhaps delay would be fatal. Uzzah had been smitten because he touched the Ark; till the sacrifice was actually offered who could tell whether some thoughtless blunder would not again

provoke the wrath of Jehovah? Under ordinary circumstances David would not have dared to sacrifice anywhere except upon the altar of burnt offering before the tabernacle at Gibeon; he would have used the ministry of priests and Levites. But ritual is helpless in great emergencies. The angel of Jehovah with the drawn sword seemed to bar the way to Gibeon, as once before he had barred Balaam's progress when he came to curse Israel. In his supreme need David builds his own altar and offers his own sacrifices; he receives the Divine answer without the intervention this time of either priest or prophet. By God's most merciful and mysterious grace, David's guilt and punishment, his repentance and pardon, broke down all barriers between himself and God.

But, as he went up to the threshing-floor, he was still troubled and anxious. The burden was partly lifted from his heart, but he still craved full assurance of pardon. The menacing attitude of the destroying angel seemed to hold out little promise of mercy and forgiveness, and yet the command to sacrifice would be cruel mockery if Jehovah did not intend to be gracious to His people and His anointed

At the threshing-floor Ornan and his four sons were threshing wheat, apparently unmoved by the prospect of the threatened pestilence. In Egypt the Israelites were protected from the plagues with which their oppressors were punished. Possibly now the situation was reversed, and the remnant of the Canaanites in Palestine were not afflicted by the pestilence that fell upon Israel. But Ornan turned back and saw the angel; he may not have known the grim mission with which the Lord's messenger had been entrusted, but the aspect of the destroyer, his threatening attitude, and

the lurid radiance of his unsheathed and outstretched sword must have seemed unmistakable tokens of coming calamity. Whatever might be threatened for the future, the actual appearance of this supernatural visitant was enough to unnerve the stoutest heart; and Ornan's four sons hid themselves.

Before long, however, Ornan's terrors were somewhat relieved by the approach of less formidable visitors. The king and his followers had ventured to show themselves openly, in spite of the destroying angel; and they had ventured with impunity. Ornan went forth and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. In ancient days the father of the faithful, oppressed by the burden of his bereavement, went to the Hittites to purchase a burying-place for his wife. Now the last of the Patriarchs, mourning for the sufferings of his people, came by Divine command to the Jebusite to purchase the ground on which to offer sacrifices, that the plague might be stayed from the people. The form of bargaining was somewhat similar in both cases. We are told that bargains are concluded in much the same fashion to-day. Abraham had paid four hundred shekels of silver for the field of Ephron in Machpelah, "with the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field." The price of Ornan's threshing-floor was in proportion to the dignity and wealth of the royal purchaser and the sacred purpose for which it was designed. The fortunate Jebusite received no less than six hundred shekels of gold.

David built his altar, and offered up his sacrifices and prayers to Jehovah. Then, in answer to David's prayers, as later in answer to Solomon's, fire fell from heaven upon the altar of burnt offering, and all this while the sword of Jehovah flamed across the heavens

above Jerusalem, and the destroying angel remained passive, but to all appearances unappeased. But as the fire of God fell from heaven, Jehovah gave yet another final and convincing token that He would no longer execute judgment against His people. In spite of all that had happened to reassure them, the spectators must have been thrilled with alarm when they saw that the angel of Jehovah no longer remained stationary, and that his flaming sword was moving through the heavens. Their renewed terror was only for a moment: "the angel put up his sword again into the sheath thereof," and the people breathed more freely when they saw the instrument of Jehovah's wrath vanish out of their sight.

The use of Machpelah as a patriarchal burying-place led to the establishment of a sanctuary at Hebron, which continued to be the seat of a debased and degenerate worship even after the coming of Christ. It is even now a Mohammedan holy place. But on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite there was to arise a more worthy memorial of the mercy and judgment of Jehovah. Without the aid of priestly oracle or prophetic utterance, David was led by the Spirit of the Lord to discern the significance of the command to perform an irregular sacrifice in a hitherto unconsecrated place. When the sword of the destroying angel interposed between David and the Mosaic tabernacle and altar of Gibeon, the way was not merely barred against the king and his court on one exceptional occasion. The incidents of this crisis symbolised the cutting off for ever of the worship of Israel from its ancient shrine and the transference of the Divinely appointed centre of the worship of Jehovah to the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite, that is

to say to Jerusalem, the city of David and the capital of Judah.

The lessons of this incident, so far as the chronicler has simply borrowed from his authority, belong to the exposition of the book of Samuel. The main features peculiar to Chronicles are the introduction of the evil angel Satan, together with the greater prominence given to the angel of Jehovah, and the express statement that the scene of David's sacrifice became the site of Solomon's altar of burnt offering.

The stress laid upon angelic agency is characteristic of later Jewish literature, and is especially marked in Zechariah and Daniel. It was no doubt partly due to the influence of the Persian religion, but it was also a development from the primitive faith of Israel, and the development was favoured by the course of Jewish history. The Captivity and the Restoration, with the events that preceded and accompanied these revolutions, enlarged the Jewish experience of nature and man. The captives in Babylon and the fugitives in Egypt saw that the world was larger than they had imagined. In Josiah's reign the Scythians from the far North swept over Western Asia, and the Medes and Persians broke in upon Assyria and Chaldæa from the remote East. The prophets claimed Scythians, Medes, and Persians as the instruments of Jehovah. The Jewish appreciation of the majesty of Jehovah, the Maker and Ruler of the world, increased as they learnt more of the world He had made and ruled; but the invasion of a remote and unknown people impressed them with the idea of infinite dominion and unlimited resources, beyond all knowledge and experience. The course of Israelite history between David and Ezra involved as great a widening of man's ideas of the universe as

the discovery of America or the establishment of Copernican astronomy. A Scythian invasion was scarcely less portentous to the Jews than the descent of an irresistible army from the planet Jupiter would be to the civilised nations of the nineteenth century. The Jew began to shrink from intimate and familiar fellowship with so mighty and mysterious a Deity. He felt the need of a mediator, some less exalted being, to stand between himself and God. For the ordinary purposes of everyday life the Temple, with its ritual and priesthood, provided a mediation; but for unforeseen contingencies and exceptional crises the Jews welcomed the belief that a ministry of angels provided a safe means of intercourse between himself and the Almighty. Many men have come to feel to-day that the discoveries of science have made the universe so infinite and marvellous that its Maker and Governor is exalted beyond human approach. The infinite spaces of the constellations seem to intervene between the earth and the presence-chamber of God; its doors are guarded against prayer and faith by inexorable laws; the awful Being, who dwells within, has become "unmeasured in height, undistinguished into form." Intellect and imagination alike fail to combine the manifold and terrible attributes of the Author of nature into the picture of a loving Father. It is no new experience, and the present century faces the situation very much as did the chronicler's contemporaries. Some are happy enough to rest in the mediation of ritual priests; others are content to recognise, as of old, powers and forces, not now, however, personal messengers of Jehovah, but the physical agencies of "that which makes for righteousness." Christ came to supersede the Mosaic ritual and the ministry of

angels; He will come again to bring those who are far off into renewed fellowship with His Father and theirs.

On the other hand, the recognition of Satan, the evil angel, marks an equally great change from the theology of the book of Samuel. The primitive Israelite religion had not yet reached the stage at which the origin and existence of moral evil became an urgent problem of religious thought; men had not yet realised the logical consequences of the doctrine of Divine unity and omnipotence. Not only was material evil traced to Jehovah as the expression of His just wrath against sin, but "morally pernicious acts were quite frankly ascribed to the direct agency of God."[1] God hardens the heart of Pharaoh and the Canaanites; Saul is instigated by an evil spirit from Jehovah to make an attempt upon the life of David; Jehovah moves David to number Israel; He sends forth a lying spirit that Ahab's prophets may prophesy falsely and entice him to his ruin.[2] The Divine origin of moral evil implied in these passages is definitely stated in the book of Proverbs: "Jehovah hath made everything for its own end, yea even the wicked for the day of evil"; in Lamentations, "Out of the mouth of the Most High cometh there not evil and good?" and in the book of Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am Jehovah, that doeth all these things."[3]

The ultra-Calvinism, so to speak, of earlier Israelite religion was only possible so long as its full significance was not understood. An emphatic assertion of the

[1] Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, ii. 270.

[2] Exod. iv. 21; Josh. xi. 20; 1 Sam. xix. 9, 10; 2 Sam. xxiv. 1 1 Kings xxii. 20–23.

[3] Prov. xvi. 4; Lam. iii. 38; Isa. xlv. 7.

absolute sovereignty of the one God was necessary as a protest against polytheism, and later on against dualism as well. For practical purposes men's faith needed to be protected by the assurance that God worked out His purposes in and through human wickedness. The earlier attitude of the Old Testament towards moral evil had a distinct practical and theological value.

But the conscience of Israel could not always rest in this view of the origin of evil. As the standard of morality was raised, and its obligations were more fully insisted on, as men shrank from causing evil themselves and from the use of deceit and violence, they hesitated more and more to ascribe to Jehovah what they sought to avoid themselves. And yet no easy way of escape presented itself. The facts remained; the temptation to do evil was part of the punishment of the sinner and of the discipline of the saint. It was impossible to deny that sin had its place in God's government of the world; and in view of men's growing reverence and moral sensitiveness, it was becoming almost equally impossible to admit without qualification or explanation that God was Himself the Author of evil. Jewish thought found itself face to face with the dilemma against which the human intellect vainly beats its wings, like a bird against the bars of its cage.

However, even in the older literature there were suggestions, not indeed of a solution of the problem, but of a less objectionable way of stating facts. In Eden the temptation to evil comes from the serpent; and, as the story is told, the serpent is quite independent of God; and the question of any Divine authority or permission for its action is not in any way dealt

with. It is true that the serpent was one of the beasts of the field which the Lord God had made, but the narrator probably did not consider the question of any Divine responsibility for its wickedness. Again, when Ahab is enticed to his ruin, Jehovah does not act directly, but through the twofold agency first of the lying spirit and then of the deluded prophets. This tendency to dissociate God from any direct agency of evil is further illustrated in Job and Zechariah. When Job is to be tried and tempted, the actual agent is the malevolent Satan; and the same evil spirit stands forth to accuse the high-priest Joshua[1] as the representative of Israel. The development of the idea of angelic agency afforded new resources for the reverent exposition of the facts connected with the origin and existence of moral evil. If a sense of Divine majesty led to a recognition of the angel of Jehovah as the Mediator of revelation, the reverence for Divine holiness imperatively demanded that the immediate causation of evil should also be associated with angelic agency. This agent of evil receives the name of Satan, the adversary of man, the *advocatus diaboli* who seeks to discredit man before God, the impeacher of Job's loyalty and of Joshua's purity. Yet Jehovah does not resign any of His omnipotence. In Job Satan cannot act without God's permission; he is strictly limited by Divine control: all that he does only illustrates Divine wisdom and effects the Divine purpose. In Zechariah there is no refutation of the charge brought by Satan; its truth is virtually admitted: nevertheless Satan is rebuked for his attempt to hinder God's gracious purposes towards His people. Thus later Jewish thought left the ultimate Divine sovereignty

[1] Zech iii. 1.

untouched, but attributed the actual and direct causation of moral evil to malign spiritual agency.

Trained in this school, the chronicler must have read with something of a shock that Jehovah moved David to commit the sin of numbering Israel. He was familiar with the idea that in such matters Jehovah used or permitted the activity of Satan. Accordingly he carefully avoids reproducing any words from the book of Samuel that imply a direct Divine temptation of David, and ascribes it to the well-known and crafty animosity of Satan against Israel. In so doing, he has gone somewhat further than his predecessors: he is not careful to emphasise any Divine permission given to Satan or Divine control exercised over him. The subsequent narrative implies an overruling for good, and the chronicler may have expected his readers to understand that Satan here stood in the same relation to God as in Job and Zechariah; but the abrupt and isolated introduction of Satan to bring about the fall of David invests the arch-enemy with a new and more independent dignity.

The progress of the Jews in moral and spiritual life had given them a keener appreciation both of good and evil, and of the contrast and opposition between them. Over against the pictures of the good kings, and of the angel of the Lord, the generation of the chronicler set the complementary pictures of the wicked kings and the evil angel. They had a higher ideal to strive after, a clearer vision of the kingdom of God; they also saw more vividly the depths of Satan and recoiled with horror from the abyss revealed to them.

Our text affords a striking illustration of the tendency to emphasise the recognition of Satan as

the instrument of evil and to ignore the question of the relation of God to the origin of evil. Possibly no more practical attitude can be assumed towards this difficult question. The absolute relation of evil to the Divine sovereignty is one of the problems of the ultimate nature of God and man. Its discussion may throw many sidelights upon other subjects, and will always serve the edifying and necessary purpose of teaching men the limitations of their intellectual powers. Otherwise theologians have found such controversies barren, and the average Christian has not been able to derive from them any suitable nourishment for his spiritual life. Higher intelligences than our own, we have been told,—

> ". . . . . reasoned high
> Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate,
> Fixed fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wandering mazes lost."

On the other hand, it is supremely important that the believer should clearly understand the reality of temptation as an evil spiritual force opposed to Divine grace. Sometimes this power of Satan will show itself as "the alien law in his members, warring against the law of his mind and bringing him into captivity under the law of sin, which is in his members." He will be conscious that "he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed." But sometimes temptation will rather come from the outside. A man will find his "adversary" in circumstances, in evil companions, in "the sight of means to do ill deeds"; the serpent whispers in his ear, and Satan moves him to wrong-doing. Let him not imagine for a moment that he is delivered over to the powers of evil; let him realise clearly that with every temptation God provides a way of escape. Every

man knows in his own conscience that speculative difficulties can neither destroy the sanctity of moral obligation nor hinder the operation of the grace of God.

Indeed, the chronicler is at one with the books of Job and Zechariah in showing us the malice of Satan overruled for man's good and God's glory. In Job the affliction of the Patriarch only serves to bring out his faith and devotion, and is eventually rewarded by renewed and increased prosperity; in Zechariah the protest of Satan against God's gracious purposes for Israel is made the occasion of a singular display of God's favour towards His people and their priest. In Chronicles the malicious intervention of Satan leads up to the building of the Temple.

Long ago Jehovah had promised to choose a place in Israel wherein to set His name; but, as the chronicler read in the history of his nation, the Israelites dwelt for centuries in Palestine, and Jehovah made no sign: the ark of God still dwelt in curtains. Those who still looked for the fulfilment of this ancient promise must often have wondered by what prophetic utterance or vision Jehovah would make known His choice. Bethel had been consecrated by the vision of Jacob, when he was a solitary fugitive from Esau, paying the penalty of his selfish craft; but the lessons of past history are not often applied practically, and probably no one ever expected that Jehovah's choice of the site for His one temple would be made known to His chosen king, the first true Messiah of Israel, in a moment of even deeper humiliation than Jacob's, or that the Divine announcement would be the climax of a series of events initiated by the successful machinations of Satan.

Yet herein lies one of the main lessons of the incident. Satan's machinations are not really successful;

he often attains his immediate object, but is always defeated in the end. He estranges David from Jehovah for a moment, but eventually Jehovah and His people are drawn into closer union, and their reconciliation is sealed by the long-expected choice of a site for the Temple. Jehovah is like a great general, who will sometimes allow the enemy to obtain a temporary advantage, in order to overwhelm him in some crushing defeat. The eternal purpose of God moves onward, unresting and unhasting; its quiet and irresistible persistence finds special opportunity in the hindrances that seem sometimes to check its progress. In David's case a few months showed the whole process complete: the malice of the Enemy; the sin and punishment of his unhappy victim; the Divine relenting and its solemn symbol in the newly consecrated altar. But with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day; and this brief episode in the history of a small people is a symbol alike of the eternal dealings of God in His government of the universe and of His personal care for the individual soul. How short-lived has been the victory of sin in many souls! Sin is triumphant; the tempter seems to have it all his own way, but his first successes only lead to his final rout; the devil is cast out by the Divine exorcism of chastisement and forgiveness; and he learns that his efforts have been made to subserve the training in the Christian warfare of such warriors as Augustine and John Bunyan. Or, to take a case more parallel to that of David, Satan catches the saint unawares, and entraps him into sin; and, behold, while the evil one is in the first flush of triumph, his victim is back again at the throne of grace in an agony of contrition, and before long the repentant sinner is bowed down

into a new humility at the undeserved graciousness of the Divine pardon: the chains of love are riveted with a fuller constraint about his soul, and he is tenfold more the child of God than before.

And in the larger life of the Church and the world Satan's triumphs are still the heralds of his utter defeat. He prompted the Jews to slay Stephen; and the Church were scattered abroad, and went about preaching the word; and the young man at whose feet the witnesses laid down their garments became the Apostle of the Gentiles. He tricked the reluctant Diocletian into ordering the greatest of the persecutions, and in a few years Christianity was an established religion in the empire. In more secular matters the apparent triumph of an evil principle is usually the signal for its downfall. In America the slave-holders of the Southern States rode rough-shod over the Northerners for more than a generation, and then came the Civil War.

These are not isolated instances, and they serve to warn us against undue depression and despondency when for a season God seems to refrain from any intervention with some of the evils of the world. We are apt to ask in our impatience,—

> "Is there not wrong too bitter for atoning?
> What are these desperate and hideous years?
> Hast Thou not heard Thy whole creation groaning,
> Sighs of the bondsman, and a woman's tears?"

The works of Satan are as earthly as they are devilish; they belong to the world, which passeth away, with the lust thereof: but the gracious providence of God has all infinity and all eternity to work in. Where to-day we can see nothing but the destroying angel with his

flaming sword, future generations shall behold the temple of the Lord.

David's sin, and penitence, and pardon were no inappropriate preludes to this consecration of Mount Moriah. The Temple was not built for the use of blameless saints, but the worship of ordinary men and women. Israel through countless generations was to bring the burden of its sins to the altar of Jehovah. The sacred splendour of Solomon's dedication festival duly represented the national dignity of Israel and the majesty of the God of Jacob; but the self-abandonment of David's repentance, the deliverance of Jerusalem from impending pestilence, the Divine pardon of presumptuous sin, constituted a still more solemn inauguration of the place where Jehovah had chosen to set His name. The sinner, seeking the assurance of pardon in atoning sacrifice, would remember how David had then received pardon for his sin, and how the acceptance of his offerings had been the signal for the disappearance of the destroying angel. So in the Middle Ages penitents founded churches to expiate their sins. Such sanctuaries would symbolise to sinners in after-times the possibility of forgiveness; they were monuments of God's mercy as well as of the founders' penitence. To-day churches, both in fabric and fellowship, have been made sacred for individual worshippers because in them the Spirit of God has moved them to repentance and bestowed upon them the assurance of pardon. Moreover, this solemn experience consecrates for God His most acceptable temples in the souls of those that love Him.

One other lesson is suggested by the happy issues of Satan's malign interference in the history of Israel as understood by the chronicler. The inauguration of the

new altar was a direct breach of the Levitical law, and involved the superseding of the altar and tabernacle that had hitherto been the only legitimate sanctuary for the worship of Jehovah. Thus the new order had its origin in the violation of existing ordinances and the neglect of an ancient sanctuary. Its early history constituted a declaration of the transient character of sanctuaries and systems of ritual. God would not eternally limit Himself to any building, or His grace to the observance of any forms of external ritual. Long before the chronicler's time Jeremiah had proclaimed this lesson in the ears of Judah: "Go ye now unto My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. . . . I will do unto the house which is called by My name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. . . . I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."[1] In the Tabernacle all things were made according to the pattern that was showed to Moses in the mount; for the Temple David was made to understand the pattern of all things "in writing from the hand of Jehovah."[2] If the Tabernacle could be set aside for the Temple, the Temple might in its turn give place to the universal Church. If God allowed David in his great need to ignore the one legitimate altar of the Tabernacle and to sacrifice without its officials, the faithful Israelite might be encouraged to believe that in extreme emergency Jehovah would accept his offering without regard to place or priest.

The principles here involved are of very wide applica-

[1] Jer. vii. 12-14; xxvi. 6. [2] 1 Chron. xxviii. 19.

tion. Every ecclesiastical system was at first a new departure. Even if its highest claims be admitted, they simply assert that within historic times God set aside some other system previously enjoying the sanction of His authority, and substituted for it a more excellent way. The Temple succeeded the Tabernacle; the synagogue appropriated in a sense part of the authority of the Temple; the Church superseded both synagogue and Temple. God's action in authorising each new departure warrants the expectation that He may yet sanction new ecclesiastical systems; the authority which is sufficient to establish is also adequate to supersede. When the Anglican Church broke away from the unity of Western Christendom by denying the supremacy of the Pope and refusing to recognise the orders of other Protestant Churches, she set an example of dissidence that was naturally followed by the Presbyterians and Independents. The revolt of the Reformers against the theology of their day in a measure justifies those who have repudiated the dogmatic systems of the Reformed Churches. In these and in other ways to claim freedom from authority, even in order to set up a new authority of one's own, involves in principle at least the concession to others of a similar liberty of revolt against one's self.

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION

IN dealing with the various subjects of this book, we have reserved for separate treatment their relation to the Messianic hopes of the Jews and to the realisation of these hopes in Christ. The Messianic teaching of Chronicles is only complete when we collect and combine the noblest traits in its pictures of David and Solomon, of prophets, priests, and kings. We cannot ascribe to Chronicles any great influence on the subsequent development of the Jewish idea of the Messiah. In the first place, the chronicler does not point out the bearing which his treatment of history has upon the expectation of a future deliverer. He has no formal intention of describing the character and office of the Messiah; he merely wishes to write a history so as to emphasise the facts which most forcibly illustrated the sacred mission of Israel. And, in the second place, Chronicles never exercised any great influence over Jewish thought, and never attained to anything like the popularity of the books of Samuel and Kings. Many circumstances conspired to prevent the Temple ministry from obtaining an undivided authority over later Judaism. The growth of their power was broken in upon by the persecutions of Antiochus and the wars of the Maccabees. The ministry of the Temple under

the Maccabæan high-priests must have been very different from that to which the chronicler belonged. Even if the priests and Levites still exercised any influence upon theology, they were overshadowed by the growing importance of the rabbinical schools of Babylon and Palestine. Moreover, the rise of Hellenistic Judaism and the translation of the Scriptures into Greek introduced another new and potent factor into the development of the Jewish religion. Of all the varied forces that were at work few or none tended to assign any special authority to Chronicles, nor has it left any very marked traces on later literature. Josephus indeed uses it for his history, but the New Testament is under very slight obligation to our author.

But Chronicles reveals to us the position and tendencies of Jewish thought in the interval between Ezra and the Maccabees. The Messiah was expected to renew the ancient glories of the chosen people, "to restore the kingdom to Israel"; we learn from Chronicles what sort of a kingdom He was to restore. We see the features of the ancient monarchy that were dear to the memories of the Jews, the characters of the prophets, priests, and kings whom they delighted to honour. As their ideas of the past shaped and coloured their hopes for the future, their conception of what was noblest and best in the history of the monarchy was at the same time the measure of what they expected in the Messiah. However little influence Chronicles may have exerted as a piece of literature, the tendencies of which it is a monument continued to leaven the thought of Israel, and are everywhere manifest in the New Testament.

We have to bear in mind that Messiah, "Anointed," was the familiar title of the Israelite kings; its use

for the priests was late and secondary. The use of a royal title to denote the future Saviour of the nation shows us that He was primarily conceived of as an ideal king; and apart from any formal enunciation of this conception, the title itself would exercise a controlling influence upon the development of the Messianic idea. Accordingly in the New Testament we find that the Jews were looking for a king; and Jesus calls His new society the Kingdom of Heaven.

But for the chronicler the Messiah, the Anointed of Jehovah, is no mere secular prince. We have seen how the chronicler tends to include religious duties and prerogatives among the functions of the king. David and Solomon and their pious successors are supreme alike in Church and state as the earthly representatives of Jehovah. The actual titles of priest and prophet are not bestowed upon the kings, but they are virtually priests in their care for and control over the buildings and ritual of the Temple, and they are prophets when, like David and Solomon, they hold direct fellowship with Jehovah and announce His will to the people. Moreover, David, as "the Psalmist of Israel," had become the inspired interpreter of the religious experience of the Jews. The ancient idea of the king as the victorious conqueror was gradually giving place to a more spiritual conception of his office; the Messiah was becoming more and more a definitely religious personage. Thus Chronicles prepared the way for the acceptance of Christ as a spiritual Deliverer, who was not only King, but also Priest and Prophet. In fact, we may claim the chronicler's own implied authority for including in the picture of the coming King the characteristics he ascribes to the priest and the prophet. Thus the Messiah of Chronicles is

distinctly more spiritual and less secular than the Messiah of popular Jewish enthusiasm in our Lord's own time. Whereas in the chronicler's time the tendency was to spiritualise the idea of the king, the tenure of the office of high-priest by the Maccabæan princes tended rather to secularise the priesthood and to restore older and cruder conceptions of the Messianic King.

Let us see how the chronicler's history of the house of David illustrates the person and work of the Son of David, who came to restore the ancient monarchy in the spiritual kingdom of which it was the symbol. The Gospels introduce our Lord very much as the chronicler introduces David: they give us His genealogy, and pass almost immediately to His public ministry. Of His training and preparation for that ministry, of the chain of earthly circumstances that determined the time and method of His entry upon the career of a public Teacher, they tell us next to nothing. We are only allowed one brief glimpse of the life of the holy Child; our attention is mainly directed to the royal Saviour when He has entered upon His kingdom; and His Divine nature finds expression in mature manhood, when none of the limitations of childhood detract from the fulness of His redeeming service and sacrifice.

The authority of Christ rests on the same basis as that of the ancient kings: it is at once human and Divine. In Christ indeed this twofold authority is in one sense peculiar to Himself; but in the practical application of His authority to the hearts and consciences of men He treads in the footsteps of His ancestors. His kingdom rests on His own Divine commission and on the consent of His subjects. God

has given Him the right to rule, but He will not reign in any heart till He receives its free submission. And still, as of old, Christ, thus chosen and well beloved of God and man, is King over the whole life of His people, and claims to rule over them in their homes, their business, their recreation, their social and political life, as well as in their public and private worship. If David and his pious successors were devoted to Jehovah and His temple, if they protected their people from foreign foes and wisely administered the affairs of Israel, Christ sets us the example of perfect obedience to the Father; He gives us deliverance and victory in our warfare against principalities and powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, and against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places; He administers in peace and holiness the inner kingdom of the believing heart. All that was foreshadowed both by David and Solomon is realised in Christ. The warlike David is a symbol of the holy warfare of Christ and the Church militant, of Him who came not to send peace on earth, but a sword; Solomon is the symbol of Christ, the Prince of peace in the Church triumphant. The tranquillity and splendour of the reign of the first son of David are types of the serene glory of Christ's kingdom as it is partly realised in the hearts of His children and as it will be fully realised in heaven; the God-given wisdom of Solomon prefigures the perfect knowledge and understanding of Him who is Himself the Word and Wisdom of God.

The shadows that darken the history of the kings of Judah and even the life of David himself remind us that the Messiah moved upon a far higher moral and spiritual level than the monarchs whose royal dignity was a type of His own. Like David, He

was exposed to the machinations of Satan; but, unlike David, He successfully resisted the tempter. He was in "all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

The great priestly work of David and Solomon was the building of the Temple and the organisation of its ritual and ministry. By this work the kings made splendid provision for fellowship between Jehovah and His people, and for the system of sacrifices, whereby a sinful nation expressed their penitence and received the assurance of forgiveness. This has been the supreme work of Christ: through Him we have access to God; we enter into the holy place, into the Divine presence, by a new and living way, that is to say His flesh; He has brought us into the perpetual fellowship of the Spirit. And whereas Solomon could only build one temple, to which the believer paid occasional visits and obtained the sense of Divine fellowship through the ministry of the priests, Christ makes every faithful heart the temple of sacred service, and He has offered for us the one sacrifice, and provides a universal atonement.

In His priesthood, as in His sacrifice, He represents us before God, and this representation is not merely technical and symbolic: in Him we find ourselves brought near to God, and our desires and aspirations are presented as petitions at the throne of the heavenly grace. But, on the other hand, in His love and righteousness He represents God to us, and brings the assurance of our acceptance.

Other minor features of the office and rights of the priests and Levites find a parallel in Christ. He also is our Teacher and our Judge; to Him and to His service all worldly wealth may be consecrated. Christ

is in all things the spiritual Heir of the house of Aaron as well as of the house of David; because He is a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, He, like Melchizedek, is also King of Salem; of His kingdom and of His priesthood there shall be no end. But while Christ is to the Kingdom of Heaven what David was to the Israelite monarchy, while in the different aspects of His work He is at once Temple, Priest, and Sacrifice, yet in the ministry of His earthly life He is above all a Prophet, the supreme successor of Elijah and Isaiah. It was only in a figure that He sat upon David's throne; it formed no part of His plan to exercise earthly dominion: His kingdom was not of this world. He did not belong to the priestly tribe, and performed none of the external acts of priestly ritual; He did not base His authority upon any genealogy with regard to priesthood, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "It is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah, as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests."[1] His royal birth had its symbolic value, but He never asked men to believe in Him because of His human descent from David. He relied as little on the authority of office as on that of birth. Officially He was neither scribe nor rabbi. Like the prophets, His only authority was His Divine commission and the witness of the Spirit in the hearts of His hearers. The people recognised Him as a prophet; they took Him for Elijah or one of the prophets; He spoke of Himself as a prophet: "Not without honour, save in his own country." We have seen that, while the priests ministered to the regular and recurring needs of the people, the Divine

[1] Heb. vii. 14

guidance in special emergencies and the Divine authority for new departures were given by the prophets. By a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt,[1] and Christ as a Prophet led His people out of the bondage of the Law into the liberty of the Gospel. By Him the Divine authority was given for the greatest religious revolution that the world has ever seen. And still He is the Prophet of the Church. He does not merely provide for the religious wants that are common to every race and to every generation: as the circumstances of His Church alter, and the believer is confronted with fresh difficulties and called upon to undertake new tasks, Christ reveals to His people the purpose and counsel of God. Even the record of His earthly teaching is constantly found to have anticipated the needs of our own time; His Spirit enables us to discover fresh applications of the truths He taught: and through Him special light is sought and granted for the guidance of individuals and of the Church in their need.

But in Chronicles special stress is laid on the darker aspects of the work of the prophets. They constantly appear to administer rebukes and announce coming punishment. Both Christ and His apostles were compelled to assume the same attitude towards Israel. Like Jeremiah, their hearts sank under the burden of so stern a duty. Christ denounced the Pharisees, and wept over the city that knew not the things belonging to its peace; He declared the impending ruin of the Temple and the Holy City. Even so His Spirit still rebukes sin, and warns the impenitent of inevitable punishment.

[1] Hos. xii. 13.

We have seen also in Chronicles that no stress was laid on any material rewards for the prophets, and that their fidelity was sometimes recompensed with persecution and death. Like Christ Himself, they had nothing to do with priestly wealth and splendour. The silence of the chronicler to the income of these prophets makes them fitting types of Him who had not where to lay His head. A discussion of the income of Christ would almost savour of blasphemy; we should shrink from inquiring how far "those who derived spiritual profit from His teaching gave Him substantial proofs of their appreciation of His ministry." Christ's recompense at the hands of the world and of the Jewish Church was that which former prophets had received. Like Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, He was persecuted and slain; He delivered a prophet's message, and died a prophet's death.

But, besides the chronicler's treatment of the offices of prophet, priest, and king, there was another feature of his teaching which would prepare the way for a clear comprehension of the person and work of Christ. We have noticed how the growing sense of the power and majesty of Jehovah seemed to set Him at a distance from man, and how the Jews welcomed the idea of the mediation of an angelic ministry. And yet the angels were too vague and unfamiliar, too little known, and too imperfectly understood to satisfy men's longing for some means of fellowship between themselves and the remote majesty of an almighty God; while still their ministry served to maintain faith in the possibility of mediation, and to quicken the yearning after some better way of access to Jehovah. When Christ came He found this faith and yearning waiting to be satisfied; they opened a door through which Christ found

His way into hearts prepared to receive Him. In Him the familiar human figures of priest and prophet were exalted into the supernatural dignity of the Angel of Jehovah. Men had long strained their eyes in vain to a far-off heaven; and, behold, a human voice recalled their gaze to the earth; and they turned and found God beside them, kindly and accessible, a Man with men. They realised the promise that a modern poet puts into David's mouth:—

"... O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever; a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

We have thus seen how the figures of the chronicler's history—prophet, priest, king, and angel—were types and foreshadowings of Christ. We may sum up this aspect of his teaching by a quotation from a modern exponent of Old Testament theology:—

"Moses the prophet is the first type of the Mediator. By his side stands Aaron the priest, who connects the people with God, and consecrates it. . . . But from the time of David both these figures pale in the imagination of the people before the picture of the Davidic king. His is the figure which appears the most indispensable condition of all true happiness for Israel. David is the third and by far the most perfect type of the Consummator."[1]

This recurrence to the king as the most perfect type of the Redeemer suggests a last application of the Messianic teaching of the chronicler. In discussing his

[1] Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, ii. 353.

pictures of the kings, we have ventured to give them a meaning adapted to modern political life. In Israel the king stood for the state. When a community combined for common action to erect a temple or repel an invader, the united force was controlled and directed by the king; he was the symbol of national union and co-operation. To-day, when a community acts as a whole, its agent and instrument is the civil government; the state is the people organised for the common good, subordinating individual ends to the welfare of the whole nation. Where the Old Testament has "king," its modern equivalent may read the state or the civil government,—nay, even for special purposes the municipality, the county council, or the school board. Shall we obtain any helpful or even intelligible result if we apply this method of translation to the doctrine of the Messiah? Externally at any rate the translation bears a startling likeness to what has been regarded as a specially modern development. "Israel looked for salvation from the king," would read, "Modern society should seek salvation from the state." Assuredly there are many prophets who have taken up this burden without any idea that their new heresy was only a reproduction of old and forgotten orthodoxy. But the history of the growth of the Messianic idea supplies a correction to the primitive baldness of this principle of salvation by the state. In time the picture of the Messianic king came to include the attributes of the prophet and the priest. If we care to complete our modern application, we must affirm that the state can never be a saviour till it becomes sensitive to Divine influences and conscious of a Divine presence.

When we see how the Messianic hope of Israel was purified and ennobled to receive a fulfilment glorious

beyond its wildest dreams, we are encouraged to believe that the fantastic visions of the Socialist may be divinely guided to some reasonable ideal and may prepare the way for some further manifestation of the grace of God. But the Messianic state, like the Messiah, may be called upon to suffer and die for the salvation of the world, that it may receive a better resurrection.

BOOK IV

THE INTERPRETATION OF HISTORY

CHAPTER I

THE LAST PRAYER OF DAVID

1 Chron. xxix. 10–19.

IN order to do justice to the chronicler's method of presenting us with a number of very similar illustrations of the same principle, we have in the previous book grouped much of his material under a few leading subjects. There remains the general thread of the history, which is, of course, very much the same in Chronicles as in the book of Kings, and need not be dwelt on at any length. At the same time some brief survey is necessary for the sake of completeness and in order to bring out the different complexion given to the history by the chronicler's alterations and omissions. Moreover, there are a number of minor points that are most conveniently dealt with in the course of a running exposition.

The special importance attached by the chronicler to David and Solomon has enabled us to treat their reigns at length in discussing his picture of the ideal king; and similarly the reign of Ahaz has served as an illustration of the character and fortunes of the wicked kings. We therefore take up the history at the accession of Rehoboam, and shall simply indicate very briefly the connection of the reign of Ahaz with what

precedes and follows. But before passing on to Rehoboam we must consider "The Last Prayer of David," a devotional paragraph peculiar to Chronicles. The detailed exposition of this passage would have been out of proportion in a brief sketch of the chronicler's account of the character and reign of David, and would have had no special bearing on the subject of the ideal king. On the other hand, the "Prayer" states some of the leading principles which govern the chronicler in his interpretation of the history of Israel; and its exposition forms a suitable introduction to the present division of our subject.

The occasion of this prayer was the great closing scene of David's life, which we have already described. The prayer is a thanksgiving for the assurance David had received that the accomplishment of the great purpose of his life, the erection of a temple to Jehovah, was virtually secured. He had been permitted to collect the materials for the building, he had received the plans of the Temple from Jehovah, and had placed them in the willing hands of his successor. The princes and the people had caught his own enthusiasm and lavishly supplemented the bountiful provision already made for the future work. Solomon had been accepted as king by popular acclamation. Every possible preparation had been made that could be made, and the aged king poured out his heart in praise to God for His grace and favour.

The prayer falls naturally into four subdivisions: vv. 10-13 are a kind of doxology in honour of Jehovah; in vv. 14-16 David acknowledges that Israel is entirely dependent upon Jehovah for the means of rendering Him acceptable service; in ver. 17 he claims that he and his people have offered willingly unto Jehovah; and

in vv. 18 and 19 he prays that Solomon and the people may build the Temple and abide in the Law.

In the doxology God is addressed as "Jehovah, the God of Israel, our Father," and similarly in ver. 18 as "Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel." For the chronicler the accession of David is the starting-point of Israelite history and religion, but here, as in the genealogies, he links his narrative to that of the Pentateuch, and reminds his readers that the crowning dispensation of the worship of Jehovah in the Temple rested on the earlier revelations to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel.

We are at once struck by the divergence from the usual formula: "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Moreover, when God is referred to as the God of the Patriarch personally, the usual phrase is "the God of Jacob." The formula, "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel," occurs again in Chronicles in the account of Hezekiah's reformation; it only occurs elsewhere in the history of Elijah in the book of Kings.[1] The chronicler avoids the use of the name "Jacob," and for the most part calls the Patriarch "Israel." "Jacob" only occurs in two poetic quotations, where its omission was almost impossible, because in each case "Israel" is used in the parallel clause.[2] This choice of names is an application of the same principle that led to the omission of the discreditable incidents in the history of David and Solomon. Jacob was the supplanter. The name suggested the unbrotherly craft of the Patriarch. It was not desirable that the Jews should be encouraged to think of Jehovah as the God of a grasping and deceitful man. Jehovah was the God of the Patriarch's nobler nature and

[1] 2 Chron. xxx. 6; 1 Kings xviii. 36.

[2] 1 Chron. xvi. 13, 17; Gen. xxxii. 28

higher life, the God of Israel, who strove with God and prevailed.

In the doxology that follows the resources of language are almost exhausted in the attempt to set forth adequately "the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, . . . the riches and honour, . . . the power and might," of Jehovah. These verses read like an expansion of the simple Christian doxology, "Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory," but in all probability the latter is an abbreviation from our text. In both there is the same recognition of the ruling omnipotence of God; but the chronicler, having in mind the glory and power of David and his magnificent offerings for the building of the Temple, is specially careful to intimate that Jehovah is the source of all worldly greatness: "Both riches and honour come of Thee, . . . and in Thy hand it is to make great and to give strength unto all."

The complementary truth, the entire dependence of Israel on Jehovah, is dealt with in the next verses. David has learnt humility from the tragic consequences of his fatal census; his heart is no longer uplifted with pride at the wealth and glory of his kingdom; he claims no credit for the spontaneous impulse of generosity that prompted his munificence. Everything is traced back to Jehovah: "All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." Before, when David contemplated the vast population of Israel and the great array of his warriors, the sense of God's displeasure fell upon him; now, when the riches and honour of his kingdom were displayed before him, he may have felt the chastening influence of his former experience. A touch of melancholy darkened his spirit for a moment; standing upon the brink of the dim, mysterious Sheol,

he found small comfort in barbaric abundance of timber and stone, jewels, talents, and darics; he saw the emptiness of all earthly splendour. Like Abraham before the children of Heth, he stood before Jehovah a stranger and a sojourner.[1] Bildad the Shuhite had urged Job to submit himself to the teaching of a venerable orthodoxy, because "we are of yesterday and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow."[2] The same thought made David feel his insignificance, in spite of his wealth and royal dominion: "Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding."

He turns from these sombre thoughts to the consoling reflection that in all his preparations he has been the instrument of a Divine purpose, and has served Jehovah willingly. To-day he can approach God with a clear conscience: "I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of my heart I have willingly offered all these things." He rejoiced, moreover, that the people had offered willingly. The chronicler anticipates the teaching of St. Paul that "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver." David gives of his abundance in the same spirit in which the widow gave her mite. The two narratives are mutually supplementary. It is possible to apply the story of the widow's mite so as to suggest that God values our offerings in inverse proportion to their amount. We are reminded by the willing munificence of David that the rich may give of his abundance as simply and humbly and as acceptably as the poor man gives of his poverty.

[1] Gen. xxiii. 4; cf. Psalms xxxix. 13, cxix. 19.

[2] Job viii. 9.

But however grateful David might be for the pious and generous spirit by which his people were now possessed, he did not forget that they could only abide in that spirit by the continued enjoyment of Divine help and grace. His thanksgiving concludes with prayer. Spiritual depression is apt to follow very speedily in the train of spiritual exaltation; days of joy and light are granted to us that we may make provision for future necessity.

David does not merely ask that Israel may be kept in external obedience and devotion: his prayer goes deeper. He knows that out of the heart are the issues of life, and he prays that the heart of Solomon and the thoughts of the heart of the people may be kept right with God. Unless the fountain of life were pure, it would be useless to cleanse the stream. David's special desire is that the Temple may be built, but this desire is only the expression of his loyalty to the Law. Without the Temple the commandments, and testimonies, and statutes of the Law could not be rightly observed. But he does not ask that the people may be constrained to build the Temple and keeping the Law in order that their hearts may be made perfect; their hearts are to be made perfect that they may keep the Law.

Henceforward throughout his history the chronicler's criterion of a perfect heart, a righteous life, in king and people, is their attitude towards the Law and the Temple. Because their ordinances and worship formed the accepted standard of religion and morality, through which men's goodness would naturally express themselves. Similarly only under a supreme sense of duty to God and man may the Christian willingly violate the established canons of religious and social life.

We may conclude by noticing a curious feature in the wording of David's prayer. In the nineteenth, as in the first, verse of this chapter the Temple, according to our English versions, is referred to as "the palace." The original word *bîrâ* is probably Persian, though a parallel form is quoted from the Assyrian. As a Hebrew word it belongs to the latest and most corrupt stage of the language as found in the Old Testament; and only occurs in Chronicles, Nehemiah, Esther, and Daniel. In putting this word into the mouth of David, the chronicler is guilty of an anachronism, parallel to his use of the word "darics." The word *bîrâ* appears to have first become familiar to the Jews as the name of a Persian palace or fortress in Susa; it is used in Nehemiah of the castle attached to the Temple, and in later times the derivative Greek name *Baris* had the same meaning. It is curious to find the chronicler, in his effort to find a sufficiently dignified title for the temple of Jehovah, driven to borrow a word which belonged originally to the royal magnificence of a heathen empire, and which was used later on to denote the fortress whence a Roman garrison controlled the fanaticism of Jewish worship.[1] The chronicler's intention, no doubt, was to intimate that the dignity of the Temple surpassed that of any royal palace. He could not suppose that it was greater in extent or constructed of more costly materials; the living presence of Jehovah was its one supreme and unique distinction. The King gave honour to His dwelling-place.

[1] Called, however, at that time Antonia.

CHAPTER II

REHOBOAM AND ABIJAH: THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL

2 CHRON. x.–xiii.

THE transition from Solomon to Rehoboam brings to light a serious drawback of the chronicler's principle of selection. In the history of Solomon we read of nothing but wealth, splendour, unchallenged dominion, and superhuman wisdom; and yet the breath is hardly out of the body of the wisest and greatest king of Israel before his empire falls to pieces. We are told, as in the book of Kings, that the people met Rehoboam with a demand for release from "the grievous service of thy father," and yet we were expressly told only two chapters before that "of the children of Israel did Solomon make no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains, and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen."[1] Rehoboam apparently had been left by the wisdom of his father to the companionship of headstrong and featherbrained youths; he followed their advice rather than that of Solomon's grey-headed counsellors, with the result that the ten tribes successfully revolted and chose Jeroboam for their king. Rehoboam assembled an army to reconquer his

[1] viii. 9.

lost territory, but Jehovah through the prophet Shemaiah forbade him to make war against Jeroboam.

The chronicler here and elsewhere shows his anxiety not to perplex simple minds with unnecessary difficulties. They might be harassed and disturbed by the discovery that the king, who built the Temple and was specially endowed with Divine wisdom, had fallen into grievous sin and been visited with condign punishment. Accordingly everything that discredits Solomon and detracts from his glory is omitted. The general principle is sound; an earnest teacher, alive to his responsibility, will not wantonly obtrude difficulties upon his hearers; when silence does not involve disloyalty to truth, he will be willing that they should remain in ignorance of some of the more mysterious dealings of God in nature and history. But silence was more possible and less dangerous in the chronicler's time than in the nineteenth century. He could count upon a docile and submissive spirit in his readers; they would not inquire beyond what they were told: they would not discover the difficulties for themselves. Jewish youths were not exposed to the attacks of eager and militant sceptics, who would force these difficulties upon their notice in an exaggerated form, and at once demand that they should cease to believe in anything human or Divine.

And yet, though the chronicler had great advantages in this matter, his own narrative illustrates the narrow limits within which the principle of the suppression of difficulties can be safely applied. His silence as to Solomon's sins and misfortunes makes the revolt of the ten tribes utterly inexplicable. After the account of the perfect wisdom, peace, and prosperity of Solomon's reign, the revolt comes upon an intelligent

reader with a shock of surprise and almost of incredulity. If he could not test the chronicler's narrative by that of the book of Kings—and it was no part of the chronicler's purpose that his history should be thus tested—the violent transition from Solomon's unbroken prosperity to the catastrophe of the disruption would leave the reader quite uncertain as to the general credibility of Chronicles. In avoiding Scylla, our author has fallen into Charybdis; he has suppressed one set of difficulties only to create others. If we wish to help intelligent inquirers and to aid them to form an independent judgment, our safest plan will often be to tell them all we know ourselves and to believe that difficulties, which in no way mar our spiritual life, will not destroy their faith.

In the next section[1] the chronicler tells how for three years Rehoboam administered his diminished kingdom with wisdom and success; he and his people walked in the way of David and Solomon, and his kingdom was established, and he was strong. He fortified fifteen cities in Judah and Benjamin, and put captains in them, and store of victuals, and oil and wine, and shields and spears, and made them exceeding strong. Rehoboam was further strengthened by deserters from the northern kingdom. Though the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua assigned to the priests and Levites cities in the territory held by Jeroboam, yet their intimate association with the Temple rendered it impossible for them to remain citizens of a state hostile to Jerusalem. The chronicler indeed tells us that "Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priest's office unto

[1] xi. 5-xii. 1, peculiar to Chronicles.

Jehovah, and appointed others to be priests for the high places and the he-goats and for the calves which he had." It is difficult to understand what the chronicler means by this statement. On the face of it, we should suppose that Jeroboam refused to employ the house of Aaron and the tribe of Levi for the worship of his he-goats and calves, but the chronicler could not describe such action as casting "them off that they should not execute the priest's office unto Jehovah." The passage has been explained to mean that Jeroboam sought to hinder them from exercising their functions at the Temple by preventing them from visiting Judah; but to confine the priests and Levites to his own kingdom would have been a strange way of casting them off. However, whether driven out by Jeroboam or escaping from him, they came to Jerusalem and brought with them from among the ten tribes other pious Israelites, who were attached to the worship of the Temple. Judah and Jerusalem became the home of all true worshippers of Jehovah; and those who remained in the northern kingdom were given up to idolatry or the degenerate and corrupt worship of the high places. The chronicler then gives us some account of Rehoboam's harem and children, and tells that he dealt wisely, and dispersed his twenty-eight sons "throughout all the lands of Judah and Benjamin, unto every fenced city." He gave them the means of maintaining a luxurious table, and provided them with numerous wives, and trusted that, being thus happily circumstanced, they would lack leisure, energy, and ambition to imitate Absalom and Adonijah.

Prosperity and security turned the head of Rehoboam as they had done that of David: "He forsook the law of Jehovah, and all Israel with him." "All Israel" means

all the subjects of Rehoboam; the chronicler treats the ten tribes as cut off from Israel. The faithful worshippers of Jehovah in Judah had been reinforced by the priests, Levites, and all other pious Israelites from the northern kingdom; and yet in three years they forsook the cause for which they had left their country and their father's house. Punishment was not long delayed, for Shishak, king of Egypt, invaded Judah with an immense host and took away the treasures of the house of Jehovah and of the king's house.

The chronicler explains why Rehoboam was not more severely punished.[1] Shishak appeared before Jerusalem with his immense host: Ethiopians, Lubim or Lybians, and Sukiim, a mysterious people only mentioned here. The LXX. and Vulgate translate Sukiim "Troglodytes," apparently identifying them with the cave-dwellers on the western or Ethiopian coast of the Red Sea. In order to find safety from these strange and barbarous enemies, Rehoboam and his princes were gathered together in Jerusalem. Shemaiah the prophet appeared before them, and declared that the invasion was Jehovah's punishment for their sin, whereupon they humbled themselves, and Jehovah accepted their penitent submission. He would not destroy Jerusalem, but the Jews should serve Shishak, "that they may know My service and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." When they threw off the yoke of Jehovah, they sold themselves into a worse bondage. There is no freedom to be gained by repudiating the restraints of morality and religion. If we do not choose to be the servants of obedience unto righteousness, our only alternative is to become the slaves "of sin

[1] xii. 2–8, 12, peculiar to Chronicles.

unto death." The repentant sinner may return to his true allegiance, and yet he may still be allowed to taste something of the bitterness and humiliation of the bondage of sin. His Shishak may be some evil habit or propensity or special liability to temptation, that is permitted to harass him without destroying his spiritual life. In time the chastening of the Lord works out the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and the Christian is weaned for ever from the unprofitable service of sin.

Unhappily the repentance inspired by trouble and distress is not always real and permanent. Many will humble themselves before the Lord in order to avert imminent ruin, and will forsake Him when the danger has passed away. Apparently Rehoboam soon fell away again into sin, for the final judgment upon him is, "He did that which was evil, because he set not his heart to seek Jehovah."[1] David in his last prayer had asked for a "perfect heart" for Solomon, but he had not been able to secure this blessing for his grandson, and Rehoboam was "the foolishness of the people, one that had no understanding, who turned away the people through his counsel."[2]

Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijah, concerning whom we are told in the book of Kings that "he walked in all the sins of his father, which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah his God, as the heart of David his father." The chronicler omits this unfavourable verdict; he does not indeed classify Abijah among the good kings by the usual formal statement that "he did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah," but Abijah delivers a hortatory speech and by Divine assistance

[1] xii. 14, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] Ecclus. xlvii. 23.

obtains a great victory over Jeroboam. There is not a suggestion of any evil-doing on the part of Abijah; and yet we gather from the history of Asa that in Abijah's reign the cities of Judah were given up to idolatry, with all its paraphernalia of "strange altars, high places, Asherim, and sun-images." As in the case of Solomon, so here, the chronicler has sacrificed even the consistency of his own narrative to his care for the reputation of the house of David. How the verdict of ancient history upon Abijah came to be set aside we do not know. The charitable work of whitewashing the bad characters of history has always had an attraction for enterprising annalists; and Abijah was a more promising subject than Nero, Tiberius, or Henry VIII. The chronicler would rejoice to discover one more good king of Judah; but yet why should the record of Abijah's sins be expunged, while Ahaziah and Amon were still held up to the execration of posterity? Probably the chronicler was anxious that nothing should mar the effect of his narrative of Abijah's victory. If his later sources had recorded anything equally creditable of Ahaziah and Amon, he might have ignored the judgment of the book of Kings in their case also.

The section[1] to which the chronicler attaches so much importance describes a striking episode in the chronic warfare between Judah and Israel. Here Israel is used, as in the older history, to mean the northern kingdom, and does not denote the spiritual Israel—*i.e.*, Judah—as in the previous chapter. This perplexing variation in the use of the term "Israel" shows how far Chronicles has departed from the religious ideas of the book of Kings, and reminds us that the

[1] xiii. 3-22, peculiar to Chronicles.

chronicler has only partially and imperfectly assimilated his older material.

Abijah and Jeroboam had each gathered an immense army, but the army of Israel was twice as large as that of Judah: Jeroboam had eight hundred thousand to Abijah's four hundred thousand. Jeroboam advanced, confident in his overwhelming superiority and happy in the belief that Providence sides with the strongest battalions. Abijah, however, was nothing dismayed by the odds against him; his confidence was in Jehovah. The two armies met in the neighbourhood of Mount Zemaraim, upon which Abijah fixed his camp. Mount Zemaraim was in the hill-country of Ephraim, but its position cannot be determined with certainty; it was probably near the border of the two kingdoms. Possibly it was the site of the Benjamite city of the same name mentioned in the book of Joshua in close connection with Bethel.[1] If so, we should look for it in the neighbourhood of Bethel, a position which would suit the few indications of place given by the narrative.

Before the battle, Abijah made an effort to induce his enemies to depart in peace. From the vantage-ground of his mountain camp he addressed Jeroboam and his army as Jotham had addressed the men of Shechem from Mount Gerizim.[2] Abijah reminded the rebels—for as such he regarded them—that Jehovah, the God of Israel, had given the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons, by a covenant of salt, by a charter as solemn and unalterable as that by which the heave-offerings had been given to the sons of Aaron.[3] The obligation of an Arab host to the guest who had sat at meat with him

[1] Josh. xviii. 22. [2] Judges ix. 8. [3] Num. xviii. 19.

and eaten of his salt was not more binding than the Divine decree which had given the throne of Israel to the house of David. And yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat had dared to infringe the sacred rights of the elect dynasty. He, the slave of Solomon, had risen up and rebelled against his master.

The indignant prince of the house of David not unnaturally forgets that the disruption was Jehovah's own work, and that Jeroboam rose up against his master, not at the instigation of Satan, but by the command of the prophet Ahijah.[1] The advocates of sacred causes even in inspired moments are apt to be one-sided in their statements of fact.

While Abijah is severe upon Jeroboam and his accomplices and calls them "vain men, sons of Belial," he shows a filial tenderness for the memory of Rehoboam. That unfortunate king had been taken at a disadvantage, when he was young and tender-hearted and unable to deal sternly with rebels. The tenderness which could threaten to chastise his people with scorpions must have been of the kind—

> "That dared to look on torture and could not look on war";

it only appears in the history in Rehoboam's headlong flight to Jerusalem. No one, however, will censure Abijah for taking an unduly favourable view of his father's character.

But whatever advantage Jeroboam may have found in his first revolt, Abijah warns him that now he need not think to withstand the kingdom of Jehovah in the hands of the sons of David. He is no longer opposed to an unseasoned youth, but to men who know their overwhelming advantage. Jeroboam need not think to

[1] 2 Chron. x. 15.

supplement and complete his former achievements by adding Judah and Benjamin to his kingdom. Against his superiority of four hundred thousand soldiers Abijah can set a Divine alliance, attested by the presence of priests and Levites and the regular performance of the pentateuchal ritual, whilst the alienation of Israel from Jehovah is clearly shown by the irregular orders of their priests. But let Abijah speak for himself: "Ye be a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods." Possibly Abijah was able to point to Bethel, where the royal sanctuary of the golden calf was visible to both armies: "Have ye not driven out the priests of Jehovah, the sons of Aaron and the Levites, and made for yourselves priests in heathen fashion? When any one comes to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, ye make him a priest of them that are no gods. But as for us, Jehovah is our God, and we have not forsaken Him; and we have priests, the sons of Aaron, ministering unto Jehovah, and the Levites, doing their appointed work: and they burn unto Jehovah morning and evening burnt offerings and sweet incense: the shewbread also they set in order upon the table that is kept free from all uncleanness; and we have the candlestick of gold, with its lamps, to burn every evening; for we observe the ordinances of Jehovah our God; but ye have forsaken Him. And, behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests, with the trumpets of alarm, to sound an alarm against you. O children of Israel, fight ye not against Jehovah, the God of your fathers; for ye shall not prosper."

This speech, we are told, "has been much admired. It was well suited to its object, and exhibits correct notions of the theocratical institutions." But, like much

other admirable eloquence, in the House of Commons and elsewhere, Abijah's speech had no effect upon those to whom it was addressed. Jeroboam apparently utilised the interval to plant an ambush in the rear of the Jewish army.

Abijah's speech is unique. There have been other instances in which commanders have tried to make oratory take the place of arms, and, like Abijah, they have mostly been unsuccessful; but they have usually appealed to lower motives. Sennacherib's envoys tried ineffectually to seduce the garrison of Jerusalem from their allegiance to Hezekiah, but they relied on threats of destruction and promises of "a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of oil olive and honey." There is, however, a parallel instance of more successful persuasion. When Octavian was at war with his fellow-triumvir Lepidus, he made a daring attempt to win over his enemy's army. He did not address them from the safe elevation of a neighbouring mountain, but rode openly into the hostile camp. He appealed to the soldiers by motives as lofty as those urged by Abijah, and called upon them to save their country from civil war by deserting Lepidus. At the moment his appeal failed, and he only escaped with a wound in his breast; but after a while his enemy's soldiers came over to him in detachments, and eventually Lepidus was compelled to surrender to his rival. But the deserters were not altogether influenced by pure patriotism. Octavian had carefully prepared the way for his dramatic appearance in the camp of Lepidus, and had used grosser means of persuasion than arguments addressed to patriotic feeling.

Another instance of a successful appeal to a hostile

force is found in the history of the first Napoleon, when he was marching on Paris after his return from Elba. Near Grenoble he was met by a body of royal troops. He at once advanced to the front, and exposing his breast, exclaimed to the opposing ranks, "Here is your emperor; if any one would kill me, let him fire." The detachment, which had been sent to arrest his progress, at once deserted to their old commander. Abijah's task was less hopeful: the soldiers whom Octavian and Napoleon won over had known these generals as lawful commanders of Roman and French armies respectively, but Abijah could not appeal to any old associations in the minds of Jeroboam's army; the Israelites were animated by ancient tribal jealousies, and Jeroboam was made of sterner stuff than Lepidus or Louis XVIII. Abijah's appeal is a monument of his humanity, faith, and devotion; and if it failed to influence the enemy, doubtless served to inspirit his own army.

At first, however, things went hardly with Judah. They were outgeneralled as well as outnumbered; Jeroboam's main body attacked them in front, and the ambush assailed their rear. Like the men of Ai, "when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind them." But Jehovah, who fought against Ai, was fighting for Judah, and they cried unto Jehovah; and then, as at Jericho, "the men of Judah gave a shout, and when they shouted, God smote Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah." The rout was complete, and was accompanied by terrible slaughter. No fewer than five hundred thousand Israelites were slain by the men of Judah. The latter pressed their advantage, and took the neighbouring city of Bethel and other Israelite towns. For the time

Israel was "brought under," and did not recover from its tremendous losses during the three years of Abijah's reign. As for Jeroboam, Jehovah smote him, and he died; but "Abijah waxed mighty, and took unto himself fourteen wives, and begat twenty-and-two sons and sixteen daughters."[1] His history closes with the record of these proofs of Divine favour, and he "slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David, and Asa his son reigned in his stead."

The lesson which the chronicler intends to teach by his narrative is obviously the importance of ritual, not the importance of ritual apart from the worship of the true God; he emphasises the presence of Jehovah with Judah, in contrast to the Israelite worship of calves and those that are no gods. The chronicler dwells upon the maintenance of the legitimate priesthood and the prescribed ritual as the natural expression and clear proof of the devotion of the men of Judah to their God.

It may help us to realise the significance of Abijah's speech, if we try to construct an appeal in the same spirit for a Catholic general in the Thirty Years' War addressing a hostile Protestant army. Imagine Wallenstein or Tilly, moved by some unwonted spirit of pious oratory, addressing the soldiers of Gustavus Adolphus:—

"We have a pope who sits in Peter's chair, bishops and priests ministering unto the Lord, in the true apostolical succession. The sacrifice of the Mass is daily offered; matins, laud, vespers, and compline are all duly celebrated; our churches are fragrant with incense and glorious with stained glass and images; we have crucifixes, and lamps, and candles; and

[1] This verse must of course be understood to give his whole family history, and not merely that of his three years' reign.

our priests are fitly clothed in ecclesiastical vestments; for we observe the traditions of the Church, but ye have forsaken the Divine order. Behold, God is with us at our head; and we have banners blessed by the Pope. O ye Swedes, ye fight against God; ye shall not prosper."

As Protestants we may find it difficult to sympathise with the feelings of a devout Romanist or even with those of a faithful observer of the complicated Mosaic ritual. We could not construct so close a parallel to Abijah's speech in terms of any Protestant order of service, and yet the objections which any modern denomination feels to departures from its own forms of worship rest on the same principles as those of Abijah. In the abstract the speech teaches two main lessons: the importance of an official and duly accredited ministry and of a suitable and authoritative ritual. These principles are perfectly general, and are not confined to what is usually known as sacerdotalism and ritualism. Every Church has in practice some official ministry, even those Churches that profess to owe their separate existence to the necessity for protesting against an official ministry. Men whose chief occupation is to denounce priestcraft may themselves be saturated with the sacerdotal spirit. Every Church, too, has its ritual. The silence of a Friends' meeting is as much a rite as the most elaborate genuflexion before a highly ornamented altar. To regard either the absence or presence of rites as essential is equally ritualistic. The man who leaves his wonted place of worship because "Amen" is sung at the end of a hymn is as bigoted a ritualist as his brother who dare not pass an altar without crossing himself. Let us then consider the chronicler's two principles in this

broad sense. The official ministry of Israel consisted of the priests and Levites, and the chronicler counted it a proof of the piety of the Jews that they adhered to this ministry and did not admit to the priesthood any one who could bring a young bullock and seven rams. The alternative was not between a hereditary priesthood and one open to any aspirant with special spiritual qualifications, but between a duly trained and qualified ministry on the one hand and a motley crew of the forerunners of Simon Magus on the other. It is impossible not to sympathise with the chronicler. To begin with, the property qualification was too low. If livings are to be purchased at all, they should bear a price commensurate with the dignity and responsibility of the sacred office. A mere entrance fee, so to speak, of a young bullock and seven rams must have flooded Jeroboam's priesthood with a host of adventurers, to whom the assumption of the office was a matter of social or commercial speculation. The private adventure system of providing for the ministry of the word scarcely tends to either the dignity or the efficiency of the Church. But, in any case, it is not desirable that mere worldly gifts, money, social position, or even intellect should be made the sole passports to Christian service; even the traditions and education of a hereditary priesthood would be more probable channels of spiritual qualifications.

Another point that the chronicler objects to in Jeroboam's priests is the want of any other than a property qualification. Any one who chose could be a priest. Such a system combined what might seem opposite vices. It preserved an official ministry; these self-appointed priests formed a clerical order; and yet it gave no guarantee whatever of either fitness or

devotion. The chronicler, on the other hand, by the importance he attaches to the Levitical priesthood, recognises the necessity of an official ministry, but is anxious that it should be guarded with jealous care against the intrusion of unsuitable persons. A conclusive argument for an official ministry is to be found in its formal adoption by most Churches and its uninvited appearance in the rest. We should not now be contented with the safeguards against unsuitable ministers to be found in hereditary succession; the system of the Pentateuch would be neither acceptable nor possible in the nineteenth century: and yet, if it had been perfectly administered, the Jewish priesthood would have been worthy of its high office, nor were the times ripe for the substitution of any better system. Many of the considerations which justify hereditary succession in a constitutional monarchy might be adduced in defence of a hereditary priesthood. Even now, without any pressure of law or custom, there is a certain tendency towards hereditary succession in the ministerial office. It would be easy to name distinguished ministers who were inspired for the high calling by their fathers' devoted service, and who received an invaluable preparation for their life-work from the Christian enthusiasm of a clerical household. The clerical ancestry of the Wesleys is only one among many illustrations of an inherited genius for the ministry.

But though the best method of obtaining a suitable ministry varies with changing circumstances, the chronicler's main principle is of permanent and universal application. The Church has always felt a just concern that the official representatives of its faith and order should commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. The prophet needs neither testi-

monials nor official status: the word of the Lord can have free course without either; but the appointment or election to ecclesiastical office entrusts the official with the honour of the Church and in a measure of its Master.

The chronicler's other principle is the importance of a suitable and authoritative ritual. We have already noticed that any order of service that is fixed by the constitution or custom of a Church involves the principle of ritual. Abijah's speech does not insist that only the established ritual should be tolerated; such questions had not come within the chronicler's horizon. The merit of Judah lay in possessing and practising a legitimate ritual, that is to say in observing the Pauline injunction to do all things decently and in order. The present generation is not inclined to enforce any very stringent obedience to Paul's teaching, and finds it difficult to sympathise with Abijah's enthusiasm for the symbolism of worship. But men to-day are not radically different from the chronicler's contemporaries, and it is as legitimate to appeal to spiritual sensibility through the eye as through the ear; architecture and decoration are neither more nor less spiritual than an attractive voice and impressive elocution. Novelty and variety have, or should have, their legitimate place in public worship; but the Church has its obligations to those who have more regular spiritual wants. Most of us find much of the helpfulness of public worship in the influence of old and familiar spiritual associations, which can only be maintained by a measure of permanence and fixity in Divine service. The symbolism of the Lord's Supper never loses its freshness, and yet it is restful because familiar and impressive because ancient. On the other hand, the maintenance of this

ritual is a constant testimony to the continuity of Christian life and faith. Moreover, in this rite the great bulk of Christendom finds the outward and visible sign of its unity.

Ritual, too, has its negative value. By observing the Levitical ordinances the Jews were protected from the vagaries of any ambitious owner of a young bullock and seven rams. While we grant liberty to all to use the form of worship in which they find most spiritual profit, we need to have Churches whose ritual will be comparatively fixed. Christians who find themselves most helped by the more quiet and regular methods of devotion naturally look to a settled order of service to protect them from undue and distracting excitement.

In spite of the wide interval that separates the modern Church from Judaism, we can still discern a unity of principle, and are glad to confirm the judgment of Christian experience from the lessons of an older and different dispensation. But we should do injustice to the chronicler's teaching if we forgot that for his own times his teaching was capable of much more definite and forcible application. Christianity and Islam have purified religious worship throughout Europe, America, and a large portion of Asia. We are no longer tempted by the cruel and loathsome rites of heathenism. The Jews knew the wild extravagance, gross immorality, and ruthless cruelty of Phœnician and Syrian worship. If we had lived in the chronicler's age and had shared his experience of idolatrous rites, we should have also shared his enthusiasm for the pure and lofty ritual of the Pentateuch. We should have regarded it as a Divine barrier between Israel and the abominations of heathenism, and should have been jealous for its strict observance.

CHAPTER III

ASA : DIVINE RETRIBUTION

2 CHRON. xiv.–xvi.

ABIJAH, dying, as far as we can gather from Chronicles, in the odour of sanctity, was succeeded by his son Asa. The chronicler's history of Asa is much fuller than that which is given in the book of Kings. The older narrative is used as a framework into which material from later sources is freely inserted. The beginning of the new reign was singularly promising. Abijah had been a very David, he had fought the battles of Jehovah, and had assured the security and independence of Judah. Asa, like Solomon, entered into the peaceful enjoyment of his predecessor's exertions in the field. "In his days the land was quiet ten years," as in the days when the judges had delivered Israel, and he was able to exhort his people to prudent effort by reminding them that Jehovah had given them rest on every side.[1] This interval of quiet was used for both religious reform and military precautions.[2] The high places and heathen idols and symbols which had somehow survived Abijah's zeal for the Mosaic ritual were swept away, and Judah was commanded to

[1] xiv. 1, 7, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] xiv. 3–9, peculiar to Chronicles.

seek Jehovah and observe the Law; and he built fortresses with towers, and gates, and bars, and raised a great army "that bare bucklers and spears," —no mere hasty levy of half-armed peasants with scythes and axes. The mighty array surpassed even Abijah's great muster of four hundred thousand from Judah and Benjamin: there were five hundred and eighty thousand men, three hundred thousand out of Judah that bare bucklers and spears and two hundred and eighty thousand out of Benjamin that bare shields and drew bows. The great muster of Benjamites under Asa is in striking contrast to the meagre tale of six hundred warriors that formed the whole strength of Benjamin after its disastrous defeat in the days of the judges; and the splendid equipment of this mighty host shows the rapid progress of the nation from the desperate days of Shamgar and Jael or even of Saul's early reign, when "there was neither shield nor spear seen among forty thousand in Israel."

These references to buildings, especially fortresses, to military stores and the vast numbers of Jewish and Israelite armies, form a distinct class amongst the additions made by the chronicler to the material taken from the book of Kings. They are found in the narratives of the reigns of David, Rehoboam, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Jotham, Manasseh, in fact in the reigns of nearly all the good kings; Manasseh's building was done after he had turned from his evil ways.[1] Hezekiah and Josiah were too much occupied with sacred festivals on the one hand and hostile invaders on the other to have much leisure for building,

[1] 1 Chron. xii., etc.; 2 Chron. xi. 5 ff., xvii. 12 ff., xxvi. 9 ff. xxvii. 4 ff., xxxiii. 14.

and it would not have been in keeping with Solomon's character as the prince of peace to have laid stress on his arsenals and armies. Otherwise the chronicler, living at a time when the warlike resources of Judah were of the slightest, was naturally interested in these reminiscences of departed glory; and the Jewish provincials would take a pride in relating these pieces of antiquarian information about their native towns, much as the servants of old manor-houses delight to point out the wing which was added by some famous Cavalier or by some Jacobite squire.

Asa's warlike preparations were possibly intended, like those of the Triple Alliance, to enable him to maintain peace; but if so, their sequel did not illustrate the maxim, "Si vis pacem, para bellum." The rumour of his vast armaments reached a powerful monarch: "Zerah the Ethiopian."[1] The vagueness of this description is doubtless due to the remoteness of the chronicler from the times he is describing. Zerah has sometimes been identified with Shishak's successor, Osorkon I., the second king of the twenty-second Egyptian dynasty. Zerah felt that Asa's great army was a standing menace to the surrounding princes, and undertook the task of destroying this new military power: "He came out against them." Numerous as Asa's forces were, they still left him dependent upon Jehovah, for the enemy were even more numerous and better equipped. Zerah led to a battle an army of a million men, supported by three hundred war chariots. With this enormous host he came to Mareshah, at the foot of the Judæan highlands, in a direction south-west of Jerusalem. In spite of the inferiority of his army, Asa came out to

[1] xiv. 9–15.

meet him; "and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah." Like Abijah, Asa felt that, with his Divine Ally, he need not be afraid of the odds against him even when they could be counted by hundreds of thousands. Trusting in Jehovah, he had taken the field against the enemy; and now at the decisive moment he made a confident appeal for help: "Jehovah, there is none beside Thee to help between the mighty and him that hath no strength." Five hundred and eighty thousand men seemed nothing compared to the host arrayed against them, and outnumbering them in the proportion of nearly two to one. "Help us, Jehovah our God; for we rely on Thee, and in Thy name are we come against this multitude. Jehovah, Thou art our God; let not man prevail against Thee."

Jehovah justified the trust reposed in Him. He smote the Ethiopians, and they fled towards the south-west in the direction of Egypt; and Asa and his army pursued them as far as Gerar, with fearful slaughter, so that of Zerah's million followers not one remained alive.[1] Of course this statement is hyperbolical. The carnage was enormous, and no living enemies remained in sight. Apparently Gerar and the neighbouring cities had aided Zerah in his advance and attempted to shelter the fugitives from Mareshah. Paralysed with fear of Jehovah, whose avenging wrath had been so terribly manifested, these cities fell an easy prey to the victorious Jews. They smote and spoiled all the cities about Gerar, and reaped a rich harvest,

[1] So R.V. marg.; R.V. text (with which A.V. is in substantial agreement): "There fell of the Ethiopians so many that they could not recover themselves"; *i.e.*, the routed army were never able to rally.

"for there was much spoil in them." It seems that the nomad tribes of the southern wilderness had also in some way identified themselves with the invaders; Asa attacked them in their turn. "They smote also the tents of cattle"; and as the wealth of these tribes lay in their flocks and herds, "they carried away sheep in abundance and camels, and returned to Jerusalem."

This victory is closely parallel to that of Abijah over Jeroboam. In both the numbers of the armies are reckoned by hundreds of thousands; and the hostile host outnumbers the army of Judah in the one case by exactly two to one, in the other by nearly that proportion: in both the king of Judah trusts with calm assurance to the assistance of Jehovah, and Jehovah smites the enemy; the Jews then massacre the defeated army and spoil or capture the neighbouring cities.

These victories over superior numbers may easily be paralleled or surpassed by numerous striking examples from secular history. The odds were greater at Agincourt, where at least sixty thousand French were defeated by not more than twenty thousand Englishmen; at Marathon the Greeks routed a Persian army ten times as numerous as their own; in India English generals have defeated innumerable hordes of native warriors, as when Wellesley—

> "Against the myriads of Assaye
> Clashed with his fiery few and won."

For the most part victorious generals have been ready to acknowledge the succouring arm of the God of battles. Shakespeare's Henry V. after Agincourt speaks altogether in the spirit of Asa's prayer:—

"... O God, Thy arm was here;
And not to us, but to Thy arm alone,
Ascribe we all. . . . . .
. . . . . Take it, God,
For it is only Thine."

When the small craft that made up Elizabeth's fleet defeated the huge Spanish galleons and galleasses, and the storms of the northern seas finished the work of destruction, the grateful piety of Protestant England felt that its foes had been destroyed by the breath of the Lord; "Afflavit Deus et dissipantur."

The principle that underlies such feelings is quite independent of the exact proportions of opposing armies. The victories of inferior numbers in a righteous cause are the most striking, but not the most significant, illustrations of the superiority of moral to material force. In the wider movements of international politics we may find even more characteristic instances. It is true of nations as well as of individuals that—

"The Lord killeth and maketh alive;
He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up:
The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich;
He bringeth low, He also lifteth up:
He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
He lifteth up the needy from the dunghill,
To make them sit with princes
And inherit the throne of glory."

Italy in the eighteenth century seemed as hopelessly divided as Israel under the judges, and Greece as completely enslaved to the "unspeakable Turk" as the Jews to Nebuchadnezzar; and yet, destitute as they were of any material resources, these nations had at their disposal great moral forces: the memory of ancient greatness and the sentiment of nationality; and to-day Italy can count hundreds of thousands like the

chronicler's Jewish kings, and Greece builds her fortresses by land and her ironclads to command the sea. The Lord has fought for Israel.

But the principle has a wider application. A little examination of the more obscure and complicated movements of social life will show moral forces everywhere overcoming and controlling the apparently irresistible material forces opposed to them. The English and American pioneers of the movements for the abolition of slavery had to face what seemed an impenetrable phalanx of powerful interests and influences; but probably any impartial student of history would have foreseen the ultimate triumph of a handful of earnest men over all the wealth and political power of the slave-owners. The moral forces at the disposal of the abolitionists were obviously irresistible. But the soldier in the midst of smoke and tumult may still be anxious and despondent at the very moment when the spectator sees clearly that the battle is won; and the most earnest Christian workers sometimes falter when they realise the vast and terrible forces that fight against them. At such times we are both rebuked and encouraged by the simple faith of the chronicler in the overruling power of God.

It may be objected that if victory were to be secured by Divine intervention, there was no need to muster five hundred and eighty thousand men or indeed any army at all. If in any and every case God disposes, what need is there for the devotion to His service of our best strength, and energy, and culture, or of any human effort at all? A wholesome spiritual instinct leads the chronicler to emphasise the great preparations of Abijah and Asa. We have no right to look for Divine co-operation till we have done our best; we are not to

sit with folded hands and expect a complete salvation to be wrought for us, and then to continue as idle spectators of God's redemption of mankind: we are to tax our resources to the utmost to gather our hundreds of thousands of soldiers; we are to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

This principle may be put in another way. Even to the hundreds of thousands the Divine help is still necessary. The leaders of great hosts are as dependent upon Divine help as Jonathan and his armour-bearer fighting single-handed against a Philistine garrison, or David arming himself with a sling and stone against Goliath of Gath. The most competent Christian worker in the prime of his spiritual strength needs grace as much as the untried youth making his first venture in the Lord's service.

At this point we meet with another of the chronicler's obvious self-contradictions. At the beginning of the narrative of Asa's reign we are told that the king did away with the high places and the symbols of idolatrous worship, and that, because Judah had thus sought Jehovah, He gave them rest. The deliverance from Zerah is another mark of Divine favour. And yet in the fifteenth chapter Asa, in obedience to prophetic admonition, takes away the abominations from his dominions, as if there had been no previous reformation, but we are told that the high places were not taken out of Israel. The context would naturally suggest that Israel here means Asa's kingdom, as the true Israel of God; but as the verse is borrowed from the book of Kings, and "out of Israel" is an editorial addition made by the chronicler, it is probably intended to

harmonise the borrowed verse with the chronicler's previous statement that Asa did away with the high places. If so, we must understand that Israel means the northern kingdom, from which the high places had not been removed, though Judah had been purged from these abominations. But here, as often elsewhere, Chronicles taken alone affords no explanation of its inconsistencies.

Again, in Asa's first reformation he commanded Judah to seek Jehovah and to do the Law and the commandments; and accordingly Judah sought the Lord. Moreover, Abijah, about seventeen years [1] before Asa's second reformation, made it his special boast that Judah had not forsaken Jehovah, but had priests ministering unto Jehovah, "the sons of Aaron and the Levites in their work." During Rehoboam's reign of seventeen years Jehovah was duly honoured for the first three years, and again after Shishak's invasion in the fifth year of Rehoboam. So that for the previous thirty or forty years the due worship of Jehovah had only been interrupted by occasional lapses into disobedience. But now the prophet Oded holds before this faithful people the warning example of the "long seasons" when Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. And yet previously Chronicles supplies an unbroken list of high-priests from Aaron downwards. In response to Oded's appeal, the king and people set about the work of reformation as if they had tolerated some such neglect of God, the priests, and the Law as the prophet had described.

Another minor discrepancy is found in the statement

[1] The second reformation is dated early in Asa's fifteenth year, and Abijah only reigned three years.

that "the heart of Asa was perfect all his days"; this is reproduced verbatim from the book of Kings. Immediately afterwards the chronicler relates the evil doings of Asa in the closing years of his reign.

Such contradictions render it impossible to give a complete and continuous exposition of Chronicles that shall be at the same time consistent. Nevertheless they are not without their value for the Christian student. They afford evidence of the good faith of the chronicler. His contradictions are clearly due to his use of independent and discrepant sources, and not to any tampering with the statements of his authorities. They are also an indication that the chronicler attaches much more importance to spiritual edification than to historical accuracy. When he seeks to set before his contemporaries the higher nature and better life of the great national heroes, and thus to provide them with an ideal of kingship, he is scrupulously and painfully careful to remove everything that would weaken the force of the lesson which he is trying to teach; but he is comparatively indifferent to accuracy of historical detail. When his authorities contradict each other as to the number or the date of Asa's reformations, or even the character of his later years, he does not hesitate to place the two narratives side by side and practically to draw lessons from both. The work of the chronicler and its presence with the Pentateuch and the Synoptic Gospels in the sacred canon imply an emphatic declaration of the judgment of the Spirit and the Church that detailed historical accuracy is not a necessary consequence of inspiration. In expounding this second narrative of a reformation by Asa, we shall make no attempt at complete harmony with the rest of Chronicles; any inconsistency between the exposition here and

elsewhere will simply arise from a faithful adherence to our text.

The occasion then of Asa's second reformation[1] was as follows: Asa was returning in triumph from his great defeat of Zerah, bringing with him substantial fruits of victory in the shape of abundant spoil. Wealth and power had proved a snare to David and Rehoboam, and had involved them in grievous sin. Asa might also have succumbed to the temptations of prosperity; but, by a special Divine grace not vouchsafed to his predecessors, he was guarded against danger by a prophetic warning. At the very moment when Asa might have expected to be greeted by the acclamations of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, when the king would be elate with the sense of Divine favour, military success, and popular applause, the prophet's admonition checked the undue exaltation which might have hurried Asa into presumptuous sin. Asa and his people were not to presume upon their privilege; its continuance was altogether dependent upon their continued obedience: if they fell into sin, the rewards of their former loyalty would vanish like fairy gold. "Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you." This lesson was enforced from the earlier history of Israel. The following verses are virtually a summary of the history of the judges :—

"Now for long seasons Israel was without the true God, and without teaching priest, and without law."

[1] xv., based upon 1 Kings xv. 13–15, but the great bulk of the chapter is peculiar to Chronicles; the original passage from Kings is reproduced, with slight changes in vv. 16–18.

Judges tells how again and again Israel fell away from Jehovah. "But when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought Him, He was found of them."

Oded's address is very similar to another and somewhat fuller summary of the history of the judges, contained in Samuel's farewell to the people, in which he reminded them how when they forgot Jehovah, their God, He sold them into the hand of their enemies, and when they cried unto Jehovah, He sent Zerubbabel, and Barak, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies on every side, and they dwelt in safety.[1] Oded proceeds to other characteristics of the period of the judges: "There was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in; but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the lands. And they were broken in pieces, nation against nation and city against city, for God did vex them with all adversity."

Deborah's song records great vexations: the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through by-ways; the rulers ceased in Israel; Gideon "threshed wheat by the winepress to hide it from the Midianites." The breaking of nation against nation and city against city will refer to the destruction of Succoth and Penuel by Gideon, the sieges of Shechem and Thebez by Abimelech, the massacre of the Ephraimites by Jephthah, and the civil war between Benjamin and the rest of Israel and the consequent destruction of Jabesh-gilead.[2]

---

[1] 1 Sam. xii. 9–11. "Barak" with LXX. and Peshito; Masoretic text has "Bedan."

[2] Judges v. 6, 7; vi. 11; viii. 15–17; ix.; xii. 1–7; xx.; xxi.

"But," said Oded, "be ye strong, and let not your hands be slack, for your work shall be rewarded." Oded implies that abuses were prevalent in Judah which might spread and corrupt the whole people, so as to draw down upon them the wrath of God and plunge them into all the miseries of the times of the judges. These abuses were wide-spread, supported by powerful interests and numerous adherents. The queen-mother, one of the most important personages in an Eastern state, was herself devoted to heathen observances. Their suppression needed courage, energy, and pertinacity; but if they were resolutely grappled with, Jehovah would reward the efforts of His servants with success, and Judah would enjoy prosperity. Accordingly Asa took courage and put away the abominations out of Judah and Benjamin and the cities he held in Ephraim. The abominations were the idols and all the cruel and obscene accompaniments of heathen worship.[1] In the prophet's exhortation to be strong, and not be slack, and in the corresponding statement that Asa took courage, we have a hint for all reformers. Neither Oded nor Asa underrated the serious nature of the task before them. They counted the cost, and with open eyes and full knowledge confronted the evil they meant to eradicate. The full significance of the chronicler's language is only seen when we remember what preceded the prophet's appeal to Asa. The captain of half a million soldiers, the conqueror of a million Ethiopians with three hundred chariots, has to take courage before he can bring himself to put away the abominations out of his own dominions. Military machinery is more readily created

[1] Cf. 1 Kings xv. 12.

than national righteousness; it is easier to slaughter one's neighbours than to let light into the dark places that are full of the habitations of cruelty; and vigorous foreign policy is a poor substitute for good administration. The principle has its application to the individual. The beam in our own eye seems more difficult to extract than the mote in our brother's, and a man often needs more moral courage to reform himself than to denounce other people's sins or urge them to accept salvation. Most ministers could confirm from their own experience Portia's saying, "I can easier teach twenty what were good to be done than be one of the twenty to follow mine own teaching."

Asa's reformation was constructive as well as destructive; the toleration of "abominations" had diminished the zeal of the people for Jehovah, and even the altar of Jehovah before the porch of the Temple had suffered from neglect: it was now renewed, and Asa assembled the people for a great festival. Under Rehoboam many pious Israelites had left the northern kingdom to dwell where they could freely worship at the Temple; under Asa there was a new migration, "for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance when they saw that Jehovah his God was with him." And so it came about that in the great assembly which Asa gathered together at Jerusalem not only Judah and Benjamin, but also Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, were represented. The chronicler has already told us that after the return from the Captivity some of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh dwelt at Jerusalem with the children of Judah and Benjamin,[1] and he is always careful to note any settlement of members of

1 Chron. ix. 3.

the ten tribes in Judah or any acquisition of northern territory by the kings of Judah. Such facts illustrated his doctrine that Judah was the true spiritual Israel, the real δωδεκάφυλον, or twelve-tribed whole, of the chosen people.

Asa's festival was held in the third month of his fifteenth year, the month Sivan, corresponding roughly to our June. The Feast of Weeks, at which first-fruits were offered, fell in this month; and his festival was probably a special celebration of this feast. The sacrifice of seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep out of the spoil taken from the Ethiopians and their allies might be considered a kind of first-fruits. The people pledged themselves most solemnly to permanent obedience to Jehovah; this festival and its offerings were to be first-fruits or earnest of future loyalty. "They entered into a covenant to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; . . . they sware unto Jehovah with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets." The observance of this covenant was not to be left to the uncertainties of individual loyalty; the community were to be on their guard against offenders, Achans who might trouble Israel. According to the stern law of the Pentateuch,[1] "whosoever would not seek Jehovah, the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman." The seeking of Jehovah, so far as it could be enforced by penalties, must have consisted in external observances; and the usual proof that a man did not seek Jehovah would be found in his seeking other gods and taking part in heathen rites. Such

[1] Exod. xxii. 20; Deut. xiii. 5, 9, 15.

apostacy was not merely an ecclesiastical offence: it involved immorality and a falling away from patriotism. The pious Jew could no more tolerate heathenism than we could tolerate in England religions that sanctioned polygamy or suttee.

Having thus entered into covenant with Jehovah, "all Judah rejoiced at their oath because they had sworn with all their heart, and sought Him with their whole desire." At the beginning, no doubt, they, like their king, "took courage"; they addressed themselves with reluctance and apprehension to an unwelcome and hazardous enterprise. They now rejoiced over the Divine grace that had inspired their efforts and been manifested in their courage and devotion, over the happy issue of their enterprise, and over the universal enthusiasm for Jehovah; and He set the seal of His approval upon their gladness, He was found of them, and Jehovah gave them rest round about, so that there was no more war for twenty years: unto the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign. It is an unsavoury task to put away abominations: many foul nests of unclean birds are disturbed in the process; men would not choose to have this particular cross laid upon them, but only those who take up their cross and follow Christ can hope to enter into the joy of the Lord.

The narrative of this second reformation is completed by the addition of details borrowed from the book of Kings. The chronicler next recounts how in the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign Baasha began to fortify Ramah as an outpost against Judah, but was forced to abandon his undertaking by the intervention of the Syrian king, Benhadad, whom Asa hired with his own treasures and those of the Temple; whereupon Asa carried off Baasha's stones and timber and built Geba

and Mizpah as Jewish outposts against Israel. With the exception of the date and a few minor changes, the narrative so far is taken verbatim from the book of Kings. The chronicler, like the author of the priestly document of the Pentateuch, was anxious to provide his readers with an exact and complete system of chronology; he was the Ussher or Clinton of his generation. His date of the war against Baasha is probably based upon an interpretation of the source used for chap. xv.; the first reformation secured a rest of ten years, the second and more thorough reformation a rest exactly twice as long as the first. In the interest of these chronological references, the chronicler has sacrificed a statement twice repeated in the book of Kings: that there was war between Asa and Baasha all their days. As Baasha came to the throne in Asa's third year, the statement of the book of Kings would have seemed to contradict the chronicler's assertion that there was no war from the fifteenth to the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.[1]

After his victory over Zerah, Asa received a Divine message[2] which somewhat checked the exuberance of his triumph; a similar message awaited him after his successful expedition to Ramah. By Oded Jehovah had warned Asa, but now He commissioned Hanani the seer to pronounce a sentence of condemnation. The ground of the sentence was that Asa had not relied on Jehovah, but on the king of Syria.

Here the chronicler echoes one of the key-notes of the great prophets. Isaiah had protested against the alliance which Ahaz concluded with Assyria in order to obtain assistance against the united onset of Rezin,

[1] 1 Kings xv. 16, 32, 33. [2] xvi. 7–10, peculiar to Chronicles.

king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, and had predicted that Jehovah would bring upon Ahaz, his people, and his dynasty days that had not come since the disruption, even the king of Assyria.[1] When this prediction was fulfilled, and the thundercloud of Assyrian invasion darkened all the land of Judah, the Jews, in their lack of faith, looked to Egypt for deliverance; and again Isaiah denounced the foreign alliance: "Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help, . . . but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek Jehovah; . . . the strength of Pharaoh shall be your shame, and the trust in the shadow of Egypt your confusion."[2] So Jeremiah in his turn protested against a revival of the Egyptian alliance: "Thou shalt be ashamed of Egypt also, as thou wast ashamed of Assyria."[3]

In their successive calamities the Jews could derive no comfort from a study of previous history; the pretext upon which each of their oppressors had intervened in the affairs of Palestine had been an invitation from Judah. In their trouble they had sought a remedy worse than the disease; the consequences of this political quackery had always demanded still more desperate and fatal medicines. Freedom from the border raids of the Ephraimites was secured at the price of the ruthless devastations of Hazael; deliverance from Rezin only led to the wholesale massacres and spoliation of Sennacherib. Foreign alliance was an opiate that had to be taken in continually increasing doses, till at last it caused the death of the patient.

Nevertheless these are not the lessons which the seer seeks to impress upon Asa. Hanani takes a

[1] Isa. vii. 17. [2] Isa. xxxi. 1; xxx. 3. [3] Jer. ii. 36.

loftier tone. He does not tell him that his unholy alliance with Benhadad was the first of a chain of circumstances that would end in the ruin of Judah. Few generations are greatly disturbed by the prospect of the ruin of their country in the distant future: "After us the Deluge." Even the pious king Hezekiah, when told of the coming captivity of Judah, found much comfort in the thought that there should be peace and truth in his days. After the manner of the prophets, Hanani's message is concerned with his own times. To his large faith the alliance with Syria presented itself chiefly as the loss of a great opportunity. Asa had deprived himself of the privilege of fighting with Syria, whereby Jehovah would have found fresh occasion to manifest His infinite power and His gracious favour towards Judah. Had there been no alliance with Judah, the restless and warlike king of Syria might have joined Baasha to attack Asa; another million of the heathen and other hundreds of their chariots would have been destroyed by the resistless might of the Lord of Hosts. And yet, in spite of the great object-lesson he had received in the defeat of Zerah, Asa had not thought of Jehovah as his Ally. He had forgotten the all-observing, all-controlling providence of Jehovah, and had thought it necessary to supplement the Divine protection by hiring a heathen king with the treasures of the Temple; and yet "the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." With this thought, that the eyes of Jehovah run to and fro throughout the earth, Zechariah[1] comforted the Jews in the dark days

[1] Zech. iv. 10.

between the Return and the rebuilding of the Temple. Possibly during Asa's twenty years of tranquillity his faith had become enfeebled for want of any severe discipline. It is only with a certain reserve that we can venture to pray that the Lord will "take from our lives the strain and stress." The discipline of helplessness and dependence preserves the consciousness of God's loving providence. The resources of Divine grace are not altogether intended for our personal comfort; we are to tax them to the utmost, in the assurance that God will honour all our drafts upon His treasury. The great opportunities of twenty years of peace and prosperity were not given to Asa to lay up funds with which to bribe a heathen king, and then, with this reinforcement of his accumulated resources to accomplish the mighty enterprise of stealing Baasha's stones and timber and building the walls of a couple of frontier fortresses. With such a history and such opportunities behind him, Asa should have felt himself competent, with Jehovah's help, to deal with both Baasha and Benhadad, and should have had courage to confront them both.

Sin like Asa's has been the supreme apostacy of the Church in all her branches and through all her generations: Christ has been denied, not by lack of devotion, but by want of faith. Champions of the truth, reformers and guardians of the Temple, like Asa, have been eager to attach to their holy cause the cruel prejudices of ignorance and folly, the greed and vindictiveness of selfish men. They have feared lest these potent forces should be arrayed amongst the enemies of the Church and her Master. Sects and parties have eagerly contested the privilege of counselling a profligate prince how he should satisfy his

thirst for blood and exercise his wanton and brutal insolence; the Church has countenanced almost every iniquity and striven to quench by persecution every new revelation of the Spirit, in order to conciliate vested interests and established authorities. It has even been suggested that national Churches and great national vices were so intimately allied that their supporters were content that they should stand or fall together. On the other hand, the advocates of reform have not been slow to appeal to popular jealousy and to aggravate the bitterness of social feuds. To Hanani the seer had come the vision of a larger and purer faith, that would rejoice to see the cause of Satan supported by all the evil passions and selfish interests that are his natural allies. He was assured that the greater the host of Satan, the more signal and complete would be Jehovah's triumph. If we had his faith, we should not be anxious to bribe Satan to cast out Satan, but should come to understand that the full muster of hell assailing us in front is less dangerous than a few companies of diabolic mercenaries in our own array. In the former case the overthrow of the powers of darkness is more certain and more complete.

The evil consequences of Asa's policy were not confined to the loss of a great opportunity, nor were his treasures the only price he was to pay for fortifying Geba and Mizpah with Baasha's building materials. Hanani declared to him that from henceforth he should have wars. This purchased alliance was only the beginning, and not the end, of troubles. Instead of the complete and decisive victory which had disposed of the Ethiopians once for all, Asa and his people were harassed and exhausted by continual warfare. The Christian life would have more decisive victories, and

would be less of a perpetual and wearing struggle, if we had faith to refrain from the use of doubtful means for high ends.

Oded's message of warning had been accepted and obeyed, but Asa was now no longer docile to Divine discipline. David and Hezekiah submitted themselves to the censure of Gad and Isaiah; but Asa was wroth with Hanani and put him in prison, because the prophet had ventured to rebuke him. His sin against God corrupted even his civil administration; and the ally of a heathen king, the persecutor of God's prophet, also oppressed the people. Three years[1] after the repulse of Baasha a new punishment fell upon Asa: his feet became grievously diseased. Still he did not humble himself, but was guilty of further sin[2]: he sought not Jehovah, but the physicians. It is probable that to seek Jehovah concerning disease was not merely a matter of worship. Reuss has suggested that the legitimate practice of medicine belonged to the schools of the prophets; but it seems quite as likely that in Judah, as in Egypt, any existing knowledge of the art of healing was to be found among the priests. Conversely physicians who were neither priests nor prophets of Jehovah were almost certain to be ministers of idolatrous worship and magicians. They failed apparently to relieve their patient: Asa lingered in pain and weakness for two years, and then died. Possibly the sufferings of his latter days had protected his people from further oppression, and had at once appealed to their sympathy and removed any cause for resentment. When he died, they only remembered

[1] The date, as before, is peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] xvi. 12 *b*, peculiar to Chronicles.

his virtues and achievements; and buried him with royal magnificence, with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices; and made a very great burning for him, probably of aromatic woods.

In discussing the chronicler's picture of the good kings, we have noticed that, while Chronicles and the book of Kings agree in mentioning the misfortunes which as a rule darkened their closing years, Chronicles in each case records some lapse into sin as preceding these misfortunes. From the theological standpoint of the chronicler's school, these invidious records of the sins of good kings were necessary in order to account for their misfortunes. The devout student of the book of Kings read with surprise that of the pious kings who had been devoted to Jehovah and His temple, whose acceptance by Him had been shown by the victories vouchsafed to them, one had died of a painful disease in his feet, another in a lazar-house, two had been assassinated, and one slain in battle. Why had faith and devotion been so ill rewarded? Was it not vain to serve God? What profit was there in keeping His ordinances? The chronicler felt himself fortunate in discovering amongst his later authorities additional information which explained these mysteries and justified the ways of God to man. Even the good kings had not been without reproach, and their misfortunes had been the righteous judgment on their sins.

The principle which guided the chronicler in this selection of material was that sin was always punished by complete, immediate, and manifest retribution in this life, and that conversely all misfortune was the punishment of sin. There is a simplicity and apparent justice about this theory that has always made it the

leading doctrine of a certain stage of moral development. It was probably the popular religious teaching in Israel from early days till the time when our Lord found it necessary to protest against the idea that the Galilæans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices were sinners above all Galilæans because they had suffered these things, or that the eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them, were offenders above all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This doctrine of retribution was current among the Greeks. When terrible calamities fell upon men, their neighbours supposed these to be the punishment of specially heinous crimes. When the Spartan king Cleomenes committed suicide, the public mind in Greece at once inquired of what particular sin he had thus paid the penalty. The horrible circumstances of his death were attributed to the wrath of some offended deity, and the cause of the offence was sought for in one of his many acts of sacrilege. Possibly he was thus punished because he had bribed the priestess of the Delphic oracle. The Athenians, however, believed that his sacrilege had consisted in cutting down trees in their sacred grove at Eleusis; but the Argives preferred to hold that he came to an untimely end because he had set fire to a grove sacred to their eponymous hero Argos. Similarly, when in the course of the Peloponnesian war the Æginetans were expelled from their island, this calamity was regarded as a punishment inflicted upon them because fifty years before they had dragged away and put to death a suppliant who had caught hold of the handle of the door of the temple of Demeter Theomophorus. On the other hand, the wonderful way in which on four or five occasions the ravages of pestilence delivered Dionysius of Syracuse

from his Carthaginian enemies was attributed by his admiring friends to the favour of the gods.

Like many other simple and logical doctrines, this Jewish theory of retribution came into collision with obvious facts, and seemed to set the law of God at variance with the enlightened conscience. "Beneath the simplest forms of truth the subtlest error lurks." The prosperity of the wicked and the sufferings of the righteous were a standing religious difficulty to the devout Israelite. The popular doctrine held its ground tenaciously, supported not only by ancient prescription, but also by the most influential classes in society. All who were young, robust, wealthy, powerful, or successful were interested in maintaining a doctrine that made health, riches, rank, and success the outward and visible signs of righteousness. Accordingly the simplicity of the original doctrine was hedged about with an ingenious and elaborate apologetic. The prosperity of the wicked was held to be only for a season; before he died the judgment of God would overtake him. It was a mistake to speak of the sufferings of the righteous: these very sufferings showed that his righteousness was only apparent, and that in secret he had been guilty of grievous sin.

Of all the cruelty inflicted in the name of orthodoxy there is little that can surpass the refined torture due to this Jewish apologetic. Its cynical teaching met the sufferer in the anguish of bereavement, in the pain and depression of disease, when he was crushed by sudden and ruinous losses or publicly disgraced by the unjust sentence of a venal law-court. Instead of receiving sympathy and help, he found himself looked upon as a moral outcast and pariah on account of his misfortunes; when he most needed Divine grace, he was bidden to

regard himself as a special object of the wrath of Jehovah. If his orthodoxy survived his calamities, he would review his past life with morbid retrospection, and persuade himself that he had indeed been guilty above all other sinners.

The book of Job is an inspired protest against the current theory of retribution, and the full discussion of the question belongs to the exposition of that book. But the narrative of Chronicles, like much Church history in all ages, is largely controlled by the controversial interests of the school from which it emanated. In the hands of the chronicler the story of the kings of Judah is told in such a way that it becomes a polemic against the book of Job. The tragic and disgraceful death of good kings presented a crucial difficulty to the chronicler's theology. A good man's other misfortunes might be compensated for by prosperity in his latter days; but in a theory of retribution which required a complete satisfaction of justice in this life there could be no compensation for a dishonourable death. Hence the chronicler's anxiety to record any lapses of good kings in their latter days.

The criticism and correction of this doctrine belongs, as we have said, to the exposition of the book of Job. Here we are rather concerned to discover the permanent truth of which the theory is at once an imperfect and exaggerated expression. To begin with, there are sins which bring upon the transgressor a swift, obvious, and dramatic punishment. Human law deals thus with some sins; the laws of health visit others with a similar severity; at times the Divine judgment strikes down men and nations before an awe-stricken world. Amongst such judgments we might reckon the punishments of royal sins so frequent in the pages of Chronicles.

God's judgments are not usually so immediate and manifest, but these striking instances illustrate and enforce the certain consequences of sin. We are dealing now with cases in which God was set at nought; and, apart from Divine grace, the votaries of sin are bound to become its slaves and victims. Ruskin has said, "Medicine often fails of its effect, but poison never; and while, in summing the observation of past life not unwatchfully spent, I can truly say that I have a thousand times seen Patience disappointed of her hope and Wisdom of her aim, I have never yet seen folly fruitless of mischief, nor vice conclude but in calamity."[1] Now that we have been brought into a fuller light and delivered from the practical dangers of the ancient Israelite doctrine, we can afford to forget the less satisfactory aspects of the chronicler's teaching, and we must feel grateful to him for enforcing the salutary and necessary lesson that sin brings inevitable punishment, and that therefore, whatever present appearances may suggest, "the world was certainly not framed for the lasting convenience of hypocrites, libertines, and oppressors."[2]

Indeed, the consequences of sin are regular and exact; and the judgments upon the kings of Judah in Chronicles accurately symbolise the operations of Divine discipline. But pain, and ruin, and disgrace are only secondary elements in God's judgments; and most often they are not judgments at all. They have their uses as chastisements; but if we dwell upon them with too emphatic an insistence, men suppose that pain is a worse evil than sin, and that sin is only to be avoided because it causes suffering to the sinner. The really serious

[1] *Time and Tide*, xii. 67. [2] George Eliot, *Romola*, xxi.

consequence of evil acts is the formation and confirmation of evil character. Herbert Spencer says in his *First Principles*[1] "that motion once set up along any line becomes itself a cause of subsequent motion along that line." This is absolutely true in moral and spiritual dynamics: every wrong thought, feeling, word, or act, every failure to think, feel, speak, or act rightly, at once alters a man's character for the worse. Henceforth he will find it easier to sin and more difficult to do right; he has twisted another strand into the cord of habit: and though each may be as fine as the threads of a spider's web, in time there will be cords strong enough to have bound Samson before Delilah shaved off his seven locks. This is the true punishment of sin: to lose the fine instincts, the generous impulses, and the nobler ambitions of manhood, and become every day more of a beast and a devil.

[1] Part II., Chap. IX.

CHAPTER IV

JEHOSHAPHAT—THE DOCTRINE OF NON-RESISTANCE

2 CHRON. xvii.–xx.

ASA was succeeded by his son Jehoshaphat, and his reign began even more auspiciously[1] than that of Asa. The new king had apparently taken warning from the misfortunes of Asa's closing years; and as he was thirty-five years old when he came to the throne, he had been trained before Asa fell under the Divine displeasure. He walked in the first ways of his father David, before David was led away by Satan to number Israel. Jehoshaphat's heart was lifted up, not with foolish pride, like Hezekiah's, but "in the ways of Jehovah." He sought the God of his father, and walked in God's commandments, and was not led astray by the evil example and influence of the kings of Israel, neither did he seek the Baals. While Asa had been enfeebled by illness and alienated from Jehovah, the high places and the Asherim had sprung up again like a crop of evil weeds; but Jehoshaphat once more removed them. According to the chronicler, this removing of high places was a very labour of Sisyphus: the stone was no sooner rolled up to the top of the hill

[1] xvii., peculiar to Chronicles.

than it rolled down again. Jehoshaphat seems to have had an inkling of this; he felt that the destruction of idolatrous sanctuaries and symbols was like mowing down weeds and leaving the roots in the soil. Accordingly he made an attempt to deal more radically with the evil: he would take away the inclination as well as the opportunity for corrupt rites. A commission of princes, priests, and Levites was sent throughout all the cities of Judah to instruct the people in the law of Jehovah. Vice will always find opportunities; it is little use to suppress evil institutions unless the people are educated out of evil propensities. If, for instance, every public-house in England were closed to-morrow, and there were still millions of throats craving for drink, drunkenness would still prevail, and a new administration would promptly reopen gin-shops.

Because the new king thus earnestly and consistently sought the God of his fathers, Jehovah was with him, and established the kingdom in his hand. Jehoshaphat received all the marks of Divine favour usually bestowed upon good kings. He waxed great exceedingly; he had many fortresses, an immense army, and much wealth; he built castles and cities of store; he had arsenals for the supply of war material in the cities of Judah. And these cities, together with other defensible positions and the border cities of Ephraim occupied by Judah, were held by strong garrisons. While David had contented himself with two hundred and eighty-eight thousand men from all Israel, and Abijah had led forth four hundred thousand, and Asa five hundred and eighty thousand, there waited on Jehoshaphat, in addition to his numerous garrisons, *eleven hundred and sixty thousand men.* Of these seven hundred and eighty thousand were men of Judah in three divisions, and

three hundred and eighty thousand were Benjamites in two divisions. Probably the steady increase of the armies of Abijah, Asa, and Jehoshaphat symbolises a proportionate increase of Divine favour.

The chronicler records the names of the captains of the five divisions. Two of them are singled out for special commendation: Eliada the Benjamite is styled "a mighty man of valour," and of the Jewish captain Amaziah the son of Zichri it is said that he offered either himself or his possessions willingly to Jehovah, as David and his princes had offered, for the building of the Temple. The devout king had devout officers.

He had also devoted subjects. All Judah brought him presents, so that he had great riches and ample means to sustain his royal power and splendour. Moreover, as in the case of Solomon and Asa, his piety was rewarded with freedom from war: "The fear of Jehovah fell upon all the kingdoms round about, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat." Some of his weaker neighbours were overawed by the spectacle of his great power; the Philistines brought him presents and tribute money, and the Arabians immense flocks of rams and he-goats, seven thousand seven hundred of each.

Great prosperity had the usual fatal effect upon Jehoshaphat's character. In the beginning of his reign he had strengthened himself against Israel and had refused to walk in their ways; now power had developed ambition, and he sought and obtained the honour of marrying his son Jehoram to Athaliah the daughter of Ahab, the mighty and magnificent king of Israel, possibly also the daughter of the Phœnician princess Jezebel, the devotee of Baal. This family connection of course implied political alliance. After a time

Jehoshaphat went down to visit his new ally, and was hospitably received.[1]

Then follows the familiar story of Micaiah the son of Imlah, the disastrous expedition of the two kings, and the death of Ahab, almost exactly as in the book of Kings. There is one significant alteration: both narratives tell us how the Syrian captains attacked Jehoshaphat because they took him for the king of Israel and gave up their pursuit when he cried out, and they discovered their mistake; but the chronicler adds the explanation that Jehovah helped him and God moved them to depart from him. And so the master of more than a million soldiers was happy in being allowed to escape on account of his insignificance, and returned in peace to Jerusalem. Oded and Hanani had met his predecessors on their return from victory; now Jehu the son of Hanani[2] met Jehoshaphat when he came home defeated. Like his father, the prophet was charged with a message of rebuke. An alliance with the northern kingdom was scarcely less reprehensible than one with Syria: "Shouldest thou help the wicked, and love them that hate Jehovah? Jehovah is wroth with thee." Asa's previous reforms were not allowed to mitigate the severity of his condemnation, but Jehovah was more merciful to Jehoshaphat. The prophet makes mention of his piety and his destruction of idolatrous symbols, and no further punishment is inflicted upon him.

The chronicler's addition to the account of the king's escape from the Syrian captains reminds us that God still watches over and protects His children even when they are in the very act of sinning against Him.

[1] 2 Chron. xviii. 1–3. [2] xix. 1–3. Peculiar to Chronicles.

Jehovah knew that Jehoshaphat's sinful alliance with Ahab did not imply complete revolt and apostacy. Hence doubtless the comparative mildness of the prophet's reproof.

When Jehu's father Hanani rebuked Asa, the king flew into a passion, and cast the prophet into prison; Jehoshaphat received Jehu's reproof in a very different spirit[1]: he repented himself, and found a new zeal in his penitence. Learning from his own experience the proneness of the human heart to go astray, he went out himself amongst his people to bring them back to Jehovah; and just as Asa in his apostacy oppressed his people, Jehoshaphat in his renewed loyalty to Jehovah showed himself anxious for good government. He provided judges in all the walled towns of Judah, with a court of appeal at Jerusalem; he solemnly charged them to remember their responsibility to Jehovah, to avoid bribery, and not to truckle to the rich and powerful. Being themselves faithful to Jehovah, they were to inculcate a like obedience and warn the people not to sin against the God of their fathers. Jehoshaphat's exhortation to his new judges concludes with a sentence whose martial resonance suggests trial by combat rather than the peaceful proceedings of a law-court: "Deal courageously, and Jehovah defend the right!"

The principle that good government must be a necessary consequence of piety in the rulers has not been so uniformly observed in later times as in the pages of Chronicles. The testimony of history on this point is not altogether consistent. In spite of all the faults of the orthodox and devout Greek

[1] xix. 4–11, peculiar to Chronicles,

emperors Theodosius the Great and Marcian, their administration rendered important services to the empire. Alfred the Great was a distinguished statesman and warrior as well as zealous for true religion. St. Louis of France exercised a wise control over Church and state. It is true that when a woman reproached him in open court with being a king of friars, of priests, and of clerks, and not a true king of France, he replied with saintly meekness, "You say true! It has pleased the Lord to make me king; it had been well if it had pleased Him to make some one king who had better ruled the realm."[1] But something must be allowed for the modesty of the saint; apart from his unfortunate crusades, it would have been difficult for France or even Europe to have furnished a more beneficent sovereign. On the other hand, Charlemagne's successor, the Emperor Louis the Pious, and our own kings Edward the Confessor and the saintly Henry VI., were alike feeble and inefficient; the zeal of the Spanish kings and their kinswoman Mary Tudor is chiefly remembered for its ghastly cruelty; and in comparatively recent times the misgovernment of the States of the Church was a byword throughout Europe. Many causes combined to produce this mingled record. The one most clearly contrary to the chronicler's teaching was an immoral opinion that the Christian should cease to be a citizen, and that the saint has no duties to society. This view is often considered to be the special vice of monasticism, but it reappears in one form or another in every generation. The failure of the administration of Louis the Pious is partly explained when we read that he was with difficulty prevented

[1] Milman, *Latin Christianity*, Book XI., Chap. I.

from entering a monastery. In our own day there are those who think that a newspaper should have no interest for a really earnest Christian. According to their ideas, Jehoshaphat should have divided his time between a private oratory in his palace and the public services of the Temple, and have left his kingdom to the mercy of unjust judges at home and heathen enemies abroad, or else have abdicated in favour of some kinsman whose heart was not so perfect with Jehovah. The chronicler had a clearer insight into Divine methods, and this doctrine of his is not one that has been superseded together with the Mosaic ritual.

Possibly the martial tone of the sentence that concludes the account of Jehoshaphat as the Jewish Justinian is due to the influence upon the chronicler's mind of the incident[1] which he now describes.

Jehoshaphat's next experience was parallel to that of Asa with Zerah. When his new reforms were completed, he was menaced with a formidable invasion. His new enemies were almost as distant and strange as the Ethiopians and Lubim who had followed Zerah. We hear nothing about any king of Israel or Damascus, the usual leaders of assaults upon Judah; we hear instead of a triple alliance against Judah. Two of the allies are Moab and Ammon; but the Jewish kings were not wont to regard these as irresistible foes, so that the extreme dismay which takes possession of king and people must be due to the third ally: the "Meunim."[2] The Meunim we have already met with in connection with the exploits of the children of

[1] xx. 1–30, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] So R.V. marg., with the LXX. The Targum has "Edomites," the A.V. is not justified by the Hebrew, and the R.V. does not make sense.

Simeon in the reign of Hezekiah; they are also mentioned in the reign of Uzziah,[1] and nowhere else, unless indeed they are identical with the Maonites, who are named with the Amalekites in Judges x. 12. They are thus a people peculiar to Chronicles, and appear from this narrative to have inhabited Mount Seir, by which term "Meunim" is replaced as the story proceeds.[2] Since the chronicler wrote so long after the events he describes, we cannot attribute to him any very exact knowledge of political geography. Probably the term "Meunim" impressed his contemporaries very much as it does a modern reader, and suggested countless hordes of Bedouin plunderers; Josephus calls them a great army of Arabians. This host of invaders came from Edom,[2] and having marched round the southern end of the Dead Sea, were now at Engedi, on its western shore. The Moabites and Ammonites might have crossed the Jordan by the fords near Jericho; but this route would not have been convenient for their allies the Meunim, and would have brought them into collision with the forces of the northern kingdom.

On this occasion Jehoshaphat does not seek any foreign alliance. He does not appeal to Syria, like Asa, nor does he ask Ahab's successor to repay in kind the assistance given to Ahab at Ramoth-gilead, partly perhaps because there was no time, but chiefly because he had learnt the truth which Hanani had sought to teach his father, and which Hanani's son had taught him. He does not even trust in his own hundreds of

[1] Cf. 1 Chron. iv. 41, R.V.; and 2 Chron. xxvi. 7.

[2] One Hebrew manuscript is quoted as having this reading. A.R.V., with the ordinary Masoretic text, have "Syria"; but it is simply absurd to suppose that a multitude from beyond the sea from Syria would first make their appearance on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

thousands of soldiers, all of whom cannot have perished at Ramoth-gilead; his confidence is placed solely and absolutely in Jehovah. Jehoshaphat and his people made no military preparations; subsequent events justified their apparent neglect: none were necessary. Jehoshaphat sought Divine help instead, and proclaimed a fast throughout Judah; and all Judah gathered themselves to Jerusalem to ask help of Jehovah. This great national assembly met "before the new court" of the Temple. The chronicler, who is supremely interested in the Temple buildings, has told us nothing about any new court, nor is it mentioned elsewhere; our author is probably giving the title of a corresponding portion of the second Temple: the place where the people assembled to meet Jehoshaphat would be the great court built by Solomon.[1]

Here Jehoshaphat stood up as the spokesman of the nation, and prayed to Jehovah on their behalf and on his own. He recalls the Divine omnipotence; Jehovah is God of earth and heaven, God of Israel and Ruler of the heathen, and therefore able to help even in this great emergency:—

"O Jehovah, God of our fathers, art Thou not God in heaven? Dost Thou not rule all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in Thy hand is power and might, so that none is able to withstand Thee."

The land of Israel had been the special gift of Jehovah to His people, in fulfilment of His ancient promise to Abraham:—

"Didst not Thou, O our God, dispossess the inhabitants of this land in favour of Thy people Israel,

[1] 2 Chron. iv. 9.

and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever?"

And now long possession had given Israel a prescriptive right to the Land of Promise; and they had, so to speak, claimed their rights in the most formal and solemn fashion by erecting a temple to the God of Israel. Moreover, the prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple had been accepted by Jehovah as the basis of His covenant with Israel, and Jehoshaphat quotes a clause from that prayer or covenant which had expressly provided for such emergencies as the present:—

"And they" (Israel) "dwelt in the land, and built Thee therein a sanctuary for Thy name, saying, If evil come upon us, the sword, judgment, pestilence, or famine, we will stand before this house and before Thee (for Thy name is in this house), and cry unto Thee in our affliction; and Thou wilt hear and save."[1]

Moreover, the present invasion was not only an attempt to set aside Jehovah's disposition of Palestine and the long-established rights of Israel: it was also gross ingratitude, a base return for the ancient forbearance of Israel towards her present enemies:—

"And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom Thou wouldest not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned aside from them and destroyed them not—behold how they reward us by coming to dispossess us of Thy possession which Thou hast caused us to possess."

For this nefarious purpose the enemies of Israel had

[1] Ver. 9; cf. 2 Chron. vi. 28, and the whole paragraph (vv. 22–30) of which our verse is a brief abstract.

come up in overwhelming numbers, but Judah was confident in the justice of its cause and the favour of Jehovah :—

"O our God, wilt Thou not execute judgment against them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee."

Meanwhile the great assemblage stood in the attitude of supplication before Jehovah, not a gathering of mighty men of valour praying for blessing upon their strength and courage, but a mixed multitude, men and women, children and infants, seeking sanctuary, as it were, at the Temple, and casting themselves in their extremity upon the protecting care of Jehovah. Possibly when the king finished his prayer the assembly broke out into loud, wailing cries of dismay and agonised entreaty; but the silence of the narrative rather suggests that Jehoshaphat's strong, calm faith communicated itself to the people, and they waited quietly for Jehovah's answer, for some token or promise of deliverance. Instead of the confused cries of an excited crowd, there was a hush of expectancy, such as sometimes falls upon an assembly when a great statesman has risen to utter words which will be big with the fate of empires.

And the answer came, not by fire from heaven or any visible sign, not by voice of thunder accompanied by angelic trumpets, nor by angel or archangel, but by a familiar voice hitherto unsuspected of any supernatural gifts, by a prophetic utterance whose only credentials were given by the influence of the Spirit upon the speaker and his audience. The chronicler relates with evident satisfaction how, in the midst of that great congregation, the Spirit of Jehovah came,

not upon king, or priest, or acknowledged prophet, but upon a subordinate minister of the Temple, a Levite and member of the Temple choir like himself. He is careful to fix the identity of this newly called prophet and to gratify the family pride of existing Levitical families by giving the prophet's genealogy for several generations. He was Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, of the sons of Asaph. The very names were encouraging. What more suitable names could be found for a messenger of Divine mercy than Jahaziel—"God gives prophetic vision"—the son of Zechariah—"Jehovah remembers"?

Jahaziel's message showed that Jehoshaphat's prayer had been accepted; Jehovah responded without reserve to the confidence reposed in Him: He would vindicate His own authority by delivering Judah; Jehoshaphat should have blessed proof of the immense superiority of simple trust in Jehovah over an alliance with Ahab or the king of Damascus. Twice the prophet exhorts the king and people in the very words that Jehovah had used to encourage Joshua when the death of Moses had thrown upon him all the heavy responsibilities of leadership: "Fear not, nor be dismayed." They need no longer cling like frightened suppliants to the sanctuary, but are to go forth at once, the very next day, against the enemy. That they may lose no time in looking for them, Jehovah announces the exact spot where the enemy are to be found: "Behold, they are coming by the ascent of Hazziz,[1] and ye shall find them at the end of the ravine before the wilderness of Jeruel." This topographical description was doubtless perfectly intelligible to the chronicler's

[1] Not Ziz, as A.R.V.

contemporaries, but it is no longer possible to fix exactly the locality of Hazziz or Jeruel. The ascent of Hazziz has been identified with the Wady Husasa, which leads up from the coast of the Dead Sea north of Engedi, in the direction of Tekoa; but the identification is by no means certain.

The general situation, however, is fairly clear: the allied invaders would come up from the coast into the highlands of Judah by one of the wadies leading inland; they were to be met by Jehoshaphat and his people on one of the "wildernesses," or plateaus of pasture-land, in the neighbourhood of Tekoa.

But the Jews went forth, not as an army, but in order to be the passive spectators of a great manifestation of the power of Jehovah. They had no concern with the numbers and prowess of their enemies; Jehovah Himself would lay bare His mighty arm, and Judah should see that no foreign ally, no millions of native warriors, were necessary for their salvation: "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle; take up your position, stand still and see the deliverance of Jehovah with you, O Judah and Jerusalem."

Thus had Moses addressed Israel on the eve of the passage of the Red Sea. Jehoshaphat and his people owned and honoured the Divine message as if Jahaziel were another Moses; they prostrated themselves on the ground before Jehovah. The sons of Asaph had already been privileged to provide Jehovah with His prophet; these Asaphites represented the Levitical clan of Gershom: but now the Kohathites, with their guild of singers, the sons of Korah, "stood up to praise Jehovah, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice," as the Levites sang when the foundations of the second Temple were laid, and when Ezra and

Nehemiah made the people enter into a new covenant with their God.

Accordingly on the morrow the people rose early in the morning and went out to the wilderness of Tekoa, ten or twelve miles south of Jerusalem. In ancient times generals were wont to make a set speech to their armies before they led them into battle, so Jehoshaphat addresses his subjects as they pass out before him. He does not seek to make them confident in their own strength and prowess; he does not inflame their passions against Moab and Ammon, nor exhort them to be brave and remind them that they fight this day for the ashes of their fathers and the temple of their God. Such an address would have been entirely out of place, because the Jews were not going to fight at all. Jehoshaphat only bids them have faith in Jehovah and His prophets. It is a curious anticipation of Pauline teaching. Judah is to be "saved by faith" from Moab and Ammon, as the Christian is delivered by faith from sin and its penalty. The incident might almost seem to have been recorded in order to illustrate the truth that St. Paul was to teach. It is strange that there is no reference to this chapter in the epistles of St. Paul and St. James, and that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not remind us how "by faith Jehoshaphat was delivered from Moab and Ammon."

There is no question of military order, no reference to the five great divisions into which the armies of Judah and Benjamin are divided in chap. xvii. Here, as at Jericho, the captain of Israel is chiefly concerned to provide musicians to lead his army. When David was arranging for the musical services before the Ark, he took counsel with his captains. In this unique military expedition there is no mention of

captains; they were not necessary, and if they were present, there was no opportunity for them to show their skill and prowess in battle. In an even more democratic spirit Jehoshaphat takes counsel with the people—that is, probably makes some proposition, which is accepted with universal acclamation.

The Levitical singers, dressed in the splendid robes[1] in which they officiated at the Temple, were appointed to go before the people, and offer praises unto Jehovah, and sing the anthem, "Give thanks unto Jehovah, for His mercy endureth for ever." These words or their equivalent are the opening words, and the second clause the refrain, of the post-Exilic Psalms: cvi., cvii., cxviii., and cxxxvi. As the chronicler has already ascribed Psalm cvi. to David, he possibly ascribes all four to David, and intends us to understand that one or all of them were sung by the Levites on this occasion. Later Judaism was in the habit of denoting a book or section of a book by its opening words.

And so Judah, a pilgrim caravan rather than an army, went on to its Divinely appointed tryst with its enemies, and at its head the Levitical choir sang the Temple hymns. It was not a campaign, but a sacred function, on a much larger scale a procession such as may be seen winding its way, with chants and incense, banners, images, and crucifixes, through the streets of Catholic cities.

Meanwhile Jehovah was preparing a spectacle to gladden the eyes of His people and reward their implicit faith and exact obedience; He was working for those who were waiting for Him. Though Judah was

[1] הדרת קדש, literally, as A.R.V., "beauty of holiness"; *i.e.*, sacred robes. Translate with R.V. marg. "praise in the beauty of holiness,' not, as A.R.V., "praise the beauty of holiness."

still far from its enemies, yet, like the trumpet at Jericho, the strain of praise and thanksgiving was the signal for the Divine intervention: "When they began to sing and praise, Jehovah set liers in wait against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir." Who were these liers in wait? They could not be men of Judah: *they* were not to fight, but to be passive spectators of their own deliverance. Did the allies set an ambush for Judah, and was it thus that they were afterwards led to mistake their own people for enemies? Or does the chronicler intend us to understand that these "liers in wait" were spirits; that the allied invaders were tricked and bewildered like the shipwrecked sailors in the *Tempest*; or that when they came to the wilderness of Jeruel there fell upon them a spirit of mutual distrust, jealousy, and hatred, that had, as it were, been waiting for them there? But, from whatever cause, a quarrel broke out amongst them; and they were smitten. When Ammonite, Moabite, and Edomite met, there were many private and public feuds waiting their opportunity; and such confederates were as ready to quarrel among themselves as a group of Highland clans engaged in a Lowland foray. "Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir utterly to slay and destroy them." But even Ammon and Moab soon dissolved their alliance; and at last, partly maddened by panic, partly intoxicated by a wild thirst for blood, a very Berserker frenzy, all ties of friendship and kindred were forgotten, and every man's hand was against his brother. "When they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another."

While this tragedy was enacting, and the air was rent with the cruel yells of that death struggle,

Jehoshaphat and his people moved on in tranquil pilgrimage to the cheerful sound of the songs of Zion. At last they reached an eminence, perhaps the long, low summit of some ridge overlooking the plateau of Jeruel. When they had gained this watchtower of the wilderness, the ghastly scene burst upon their gaze. Jehovah had kept His word: they had found their enemy. They "looked upon the multitude," all those hordes of heathen tribes that had filled them with terror and dismay. They were harmless enough now: the Jews saw nothing but "dead bodies fallen to the earth"; and in that Aceldama lay all the multitude of profane invaders who had dared to violate the sanctity of the Promised Land: "There were none that escaped." So had Israel looked back after crossing the Red Sea and seen the corpses of the Egyptians washed up on the shore.[1] So when the angel of Jehovah smote Sennacherib,—

> "Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath blown,
> That host on the morrow lay withered and strown."

There is no touch of pity for the wretched victims of their own sins. Greeks of every city and tribe could feel the pathos of the tragic end of the Athenian expedition against Syracuse; but the Jews had no ruth for the kindred tribes that dwelt along their frontier, and the age of the chronicler had not yet learnt that Jehovah had either tenderness or compassion for the enemies of Israel.

The spectators of this carnage—we cannot call them victors—did not neglect to profit to the utmost by their great opportunity. They spent three days in

[1] Exod. xiv. 30.

stripping the dead bodies; and as Orientals delight in jewelled weapons and costly garments, and their chiefs take the field with barbaric ostentation of wealth, the spoil was both valuable and abundant: "riches, and raiment,[1] and precious jewels, . . . more than they could carry away."

In collecting the spoil, the Jews had become dispersed through all the wide area over which the fighting between the confederates must have extended; but on the fourth day they gathered together again in a neighbouring valley and gave solemn thanks for their deliverance: "There they blessed Jehovah; therefore the name of that place was called the valley of Berachah unto this day." West of Tekoa,[2] not too far from the scene of carnage, a ruin and a wady still bear the name "Bereikut"; and doubtless in the chronicler's time the valley was called Berachah, and local tradition furnished our author with this explanation of the origin of the name.

When the spoil was all collected, they returned to Jerusalem as they came, in solemn procession, headed, no doubt, by the Levites, with psalteries, and harps, and trumpets. They came back to the scene of their anxious supplications: to the house of Jehovah. But yesterday, as it were, they had assembled before Jehovah, terror-stricken at the report of an irresistible host of invaders; and to-day their enemies were utterly destroyed. They had experienced a deliverance that might rank with the Exodus; and as at that former deliverance they had spoiled the Egyptians, so now they had returned

[1] With R.V. marg.

[2] The identification of the valley of Berachah with the valley of Jehoshaphat, close to Jerusalem and mentioned by Josephus, is a mere theory, quite at variance with the topographical evidence.

laden with the plunder of Moab, Ammon, and Edom. And all their neighbours were smitten with fear when they heard of the awful ruin which Jehovah had brought upon these enemies of Israel. No one would dare to invade a country where Jehovah laid a ghostly ambush of liers in wait for the enemies of His people. The realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet, not because he was protected by powerful allies or by the swords of his numerous and valiant soldiers, but because Judah had become another Eden, and cherubim with flaming swords guarded the frontier on every hand, and "his God gave him rest round about."

Then follow the regular summary and conclusion of the history of the reign taken from the book of Kings, with the usual alterations in the reference to further sources of information. We are told here, in direct contradiction to xvii. 6 and to the whole tenor of the previous chapters, that the high places were not taken away, another illustration of the slight importance the chronicler attached to accuracy in details. He either overlooks the contradiction between passages borrowed from different sources, or else does not think it worth while to harmonise his inconsistent materials.

But after the narrative of the reign is thus formally closed the chronicler inserts a postscript, perhaps by a kind of after-thought. The book of Kings narrates[1] how Jehoshaphat made ships to go to Ophir for gold, but they were broken at Ezion-geber; then Ahaziah the son of Ahab proposed to enter into partnership with Jehoshaphat, and the latter rejected his proposal. As we have seen, the chronicler's theory of retribution required some reason why so pious a king experienced

[1] 1 Kings xxii. 48, 49.

misfortune. What sin had Jehoshaphat committed to deserve to have his ships broken? The chronicler has a new version of the story, which provides an answer to this question. Jehoshaphat did not build any ships by himself; his unfortunate navy was constructed in partnership with Ahaziah; and accordingly the prophet Eliezer rebuked him for allying himself a second time with a wicked king of Israel, and announced the coming wreck of the ships. And so it came about that the ships were broken, and the shadow of Divine displeasure rested on the last days of Jehoshaphat.

We have next to notice the chronicler's most important omissions. The book of Kings narrates another alliance of Jehoshaphat with Jehoram, king of Israel, like his alliances with Ahab and Ahaziah. The narrative of this incident closely resembles that of the earlier joint expedition to Ramoth-gilead. As then Jehoshaphat marched out with Ahab, so now he accompanies Ahab's son Jehoram, taking with him his subject ally the king of Edom. Here also a prophet appears upon the scene; but on this occasion Elisha addresses no rebuke to Jehoshaphat for his alliance with Israel, but treats him with marked respect: and the allied army wins a great victory. If this narrative had been included in Chronicles, the reign of Jehoshaphat would not have afforded an altogether satisfactory illustration of the main lesson which the chronicler intended it to teach.

This main lesson was that the chosen people should not look for protection against their enemies either to foreign alliances or to their own military strength, but solely to the grace and omnipotence of Jehovah. One negative aspect of this principle has been enforced by the condemnation of Asa's alliance with Syria and

Jehoshaphat's with Ahab and Ahaziah. Later on the uselessness of an army apart from Jehovah is shown in the defeat of "the great host" of Joash by "a small company" of Syrians.[1] The positive aspect has been partially illustrated by the signal victories of Abijah and Asa against overwhelming odds and without the help of any foreign allies. But these were partial and unsatisfactory illustrations: Jehovah vouchsafed to share the glory of these victories with great armies that were numbered by the hundred thousand. And after all, the odds were not so very overwhelming. Scores of parallels may be found in which the odds were much greater. In the case of vast Oriental hosts a superiority of two to one might easily be counterbalanced by discipline and valour in the smaller army.

The peculiar value to the chronicler of the deliverance from Moab, Ammon, and the Meunim lay in the fact that no human arm divided the glory with Jehovah. It was shown conclusively not merely that Judah could safely be contented with an army smaller than those of its neighbours, but that Judah would be equally safe with no army at all. We feel that this lesson is taught with added force when we remember that Jehoshaphat had a larger army than is ascribed to any Israelite or Jewish king after David. Yet he places no confidence in his eleven hundred and sixty thousand warriors, and he is not allowed to make any use of them. In the case of a king with small military resources, to trust in Jehovah might be merely making a virtue of necessity; but if Jehoshaphat, with his immense army, felt that his only real help was in his God, the example furnished an *à fortiori* argument which would conclusively show

[1] 2 Chron. xxiv. 24, peculiar to Chronicles.

that it was always the duty and privilege of the Jews to say with the Psalmist, "Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of Jehovah our God."[1] The ancient literature of Israel furnished other illustrations of the principle: at the Red Sea the Israelites had been delivered without any exercise of their own warlike prowess; at Jericho, as at Jeruel, the enemy had been completely overthrown by Jehovah before His people rushed upon the spoil; and the same direct Divine intervention saved Jerusalem from Sennacherib. But the later history of the Jews had been a series of illustrations of enforced dependence upon Jehovah. A little semi-ecclesiastical community inhabiting a small province that passed from one great power to another like a counter in the game of international politics had no choice but to trust in Jehovah, if it were in any way to maintain its self-respect. For this community of the second Temple to have had confidence in its sword and bow would have seemed equally absurd to the Jews and to their Persian and Greek masters.

When they were thus helpless, Jehovah wrought for Israel, as He had destroyed the enemies of Jehoshaphat in the wilderness of Jeruel. The Jews stood still and saw the working out of their deliverance; great empires wrestled together like Moab, Ammon, and Edom, in the agony of the death struggle: and over all the tumult of battle Israel heard the voice of Jehovah, "The battle is not yours, but God's; . . . set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the deliverance of Jehovah with you, O Judah and Jerusalem." Before their eyes there passed the scenes of that great drama which for a time

[1] Psalm xx. 7.

gave Western Asia Aryan instead of Semitic masters. For them the whole action had but one meaning: without calling Israel into the field, Jehovah was devoting to destruction the enemies of His people and opening up a way for His redeemed to return, like Jehoshaphat's procession, to the Holy City and the Temple. The long series of wars became a wager of battle, in which Israel, herself a passive spectator, appeared by her Divine Champion; and the assured issue was her triumphant vindication and restoration to her ancient throne in Zion.

After the Restoration God's protecting providence asked no armed assistance from Judah. The mandates of a distant court authorised the rebuilding of the Temple and the fortifying of the city. The Jews solaced their national pride and found consolation for their weakness and subjection in the thought that their ostensible masters were in reality only the instruments which Jehovah used to provide for the security and prosperity of His children.

We have already noticed that this philosophy of history is not peculiar to Israel. Every nation has a similar system, and regards its own interests as the supreme care of Providence. We have seen, too, that moral influences have controlled and checkmated material forces; God has fought against the biggest battalions. Similarly the Jews are not the only people for whom deliverances have been worked out almost without any co-operation on their own part. It was not a negro revolt, for instance, that set free the slaves of our colonies or of the Southern States. Italy regained her Eternal City as an incidental effect of a great war in which she herself took no part. Important political movements and great struggles involve consequences

equally unforeseen and unintended by the chief actors in these dramas, consequences which would seem to them insignificant compared with more obvious results. Some obscure nation almost ready to perish is given a respite, a breathing space, in which it gathers strength; instead of losing its separate existence, it endures till time and opportunity make it one of the ruling influences in the world's history: some Geneva or Wittenberg becomes, just at the right time, a secure refuge and vantage-ground for one of the Lord's prophets. Our understanding of what God is doing in our time and our hopes for what He may yet do will indeed be small, if we think that God can do nothing for our cause unless our banner flies in the forefront of the battle, and the war-cry is "The sword of Gideon!" as well as "The sword of Jehovah!" There will be many battles fought in which we shall strike no blow and yet be privileged to divide the spoil. We sometimes "stand still and see the salvation of Jehovah."

The chronicler has found disciples in these latter days of a kindlier spirit and more catholic sympathies. He and they have reached their common doctrines by different paths, but the chronicler teaches non-resistance as clearly as the Society of Friends. "When you have fully yielded yourself to the Divine teaching," he says, "you will neither fight yourself nor ask others to fight for you; you will simply stand still and watch a Divine providence protecting you and destroying your enemies." The Friends could almost echo this teaching, not perhaps laying quite so much stress on the destruction of the enemy, though among the visions of the earlier Friends there were many that revealed the coming judgments of the Lord; and the modern enthusiast is still apt to consider that his enemies, are the Lord's enemies and

to call the gratification of his own revengeful spirit a vindicating of the honour of the Lord and a satisfaction of outraged justice.

If the chronicler had lived to-day, the history of the Society of Friends might have furnished him with illustrations almost as apt as the destruction of the allied invaders of Judah. He would have rejoiced to tell us how a people that repudiated any resort to violence succeeded in conciliating savage tribes and founding the flourishing colony of Pennsylvania, and would have seen the hand of the Lord in the wealth and honour that have been accorded to a once despised and persecuted sect.

We should be passing to matters that were still beyond the chronicler's horizon, if we were to connect his teaching with our Lord's injunction, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Such a sentiment scarcely harmonises with the three days' stripping of dead bodies in the wilderness of Jeruel. But though the chronicler's motives for non-resistance were not touched and softened with the Divine gentleness of Jesus of Nazareth, and his object was not to persuade his hearers to patient endurance of wrong, yet he had conceived the possibility of a mighty faith that could put its fortunes unreservedly into the hands of God and trust Him with the issues. If we are ever to be worthy citizens of the kingdom of our Lord, it can only be by the sustaining power and inspiring influence of a like faith.

When we come to ask how far the people for whom he wrote responded to his teaching and carried it into practical life, we are met with one of the many instances of the grim irony of history. Probably the

chronicler's glowing vision of peaceful security, guarded on every hand by legions of angels, was partly inspired by the comparative prosperity of the time at which he wrote. Other considerations combine with this to suggest that the composition of his work beguiled the happy leisure of one of the brighter intervals between Ezra and the Maccabees.

Circumstances were soon to test the readiness of the Jews, in times of national danger, to observe the attitude of passive spectators and wait for a Divine deliverance. It was not altogether in this spirit that the priests met the savage persecutions of Antiochus. They made no vain attempts to exorcise this evil spirit with hymns, and psalteries, and harps, and trumpets; but the priest Mattathias and his sons slew the king's commissioner and raised the standard of armed revolt. We do indeed find indications of something like obedience to the chronicler's principles. A body of the revolted Jews were attacked on the Sabbath Day; they made no attempt to defend themselves: "When they gave them battle with all speed, they answered them not, neither cast they a stone at them, nor stopped the places where they lay hid, . . . and their enemies rose up against them on the sabbath, and slew them, with their wives, and their children, and their cattle, to the number of a thousand people."[1] No Divine intervention rewarded this devoted faith, nor apparently did the Jews expect it, for they had said, "Let us die all in our innocency; heaven and earth shall testify for us that ye put us to death wrongfully." This is, after all, a higher note than that of Chronicles: obedience may not bring invariable reward; nevertheless the faithful will

[1] 1 Macc. ii. 35–38.

not swerve from their loyalty. But the priestly leaders of the people looked with no favourable eye upon this offering up of human hecatombs in honour of the sanctity of the Sabbath. They were not prepared to die passively; and, as representatives of Jehovah and of the nation for the time being, they decreed that henceforth they would fight against those who attacked them, even on the Sabbath Day. Warfare on these more secular principles was crowned with that visible success which the chronicler regarded as the manifest sign of Divine approval; and a dynasty of royal priests filled the throne and led the armies of Israel, and assured and strengthened their authority by intrigues and alliances with every heathen sovereign within their reach.

CHAPTER V

JEHORAM, AHAZIAH, AND ATHALIAH: THE CONSEQUENCES OF A FOREIGN MARRIAGE

2 CHRON. xxi.–xxiii.

THE accession of Jehoram is one of the instances in which a wicked son succeeded to a conspicuously pious father, but in this case there is no difficulty in explaining the phenomenon: the depraved character and evil deeds of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah are at once accounted for when we remember that they were respectively the son-in-law, grandson, and daughter of Ahab, and possibly of Jezebel. If, however, Jezebel were really the mother of Athaliah, it is difficult to believe that the chronicler understood or at any rate realised the fact. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah the chronicler lays great stress upon the iniquity and inexpediency of marriage with strange wives, and he has been careful to insert a note into the history of Jehoshaphat to call attention to the fact that the king of Judah had joined affinity with Ahab. If he had understood that this implied joining affinity with a Phœnician devotee of Baal, this significant fact would not have been passed over in silence. Moreover, the names Athaliah and Ahaziah are both compounded with the sacred name Jehovah. A Phœnician Baal-worshipper may very well have been sufficiently eclectic

to make such use of the name sacred to the family into which she married, but on the whole those names rather tell against the descent of their owners from Jezebel and her Zidonian ancestors.

We have seen that, after giving the concluding formula for the reign of Jehoshaphat, the chronicler adds a postscript narrating an incident discreditable to the king. Similarly he prefaces the introductory formula for the reign of Jehoram by inserting a cruel deed of the new king. Before telling us Jehoram's age at his accession and the length of his reign, the chronicler relates[1] the steps taken by Jehoram to secure himself upon his throne. Jehoshaphat, like Rehoboam, had disposed of his numerous sons in the fenced cities of Judah, and had sought to make them quiet and contented by providing largely for their material welfare: "Their father gave them great gifts: silver, gold, and precious things, with fenced cities in Judah." The sanguine judgment of paternal affection might expect that these gifts would make his younger sons loyal and devoted subjects of their elder brother; but Jehoram, not without reason, feared that treasure and cities might supply the means for a revolt, or that Judah might be split up into a number of small principalities. Accordingly when he had strengthened himself he slew all his brethren with the sword, and with them those princes of Israel whom he suspected of attachment to his other victims. He was following the precedent set by Solomon when he ordered the execution of Adonijah; and, indeed, the slaughter by a new sovereign of all those near relations who might possibly dispute his claim to the throne has usually

[1] xxi. 2–4, peculiar to Chronicles.

been considered in the East to be a painful but necessary and perfectly justifiable act, being, in fact, regarded in much the same light as the drowning of superfluous kittens in domestic circles. Probably this episode is placed before the introductory formula for the reign because until these possible rivals were removed Jehoram's tenure of the throne was altogether unsafe.

For the next few verses[1] the narrative follows the book of Kings with scarcely any alteration, and states the evil character of the new reign, accounting for Jehoram's depravity by his marriage with a daughter of Ahab. The successful revolt of Edom from Judah is next given, and the chronicler adds a note of his own to the effect that Jehoram experienced these reverses because he had forsaken Jehovah, the God of his fathers.

Then the chronicler proceeds[2] to describe further sins and misfortunes of Jehoram. He mentions definitely, what is doubtless implied by the book of Kings, that Jehoram made high places in the cities of Judah[3] and seduced the people into taking part in a corrupt worship. The Divine condemnation of the king's wrong-doing came from an unexpected quarter and in an unusual fashion. The other prophetic messages specially recorded by the chronicler were uttered by prophets of Judah, some apparently receiving their inspiration for one particular occasion. The prophet who rebuked Jehoram was no less distinguished a personage than the great Israelite Elijah, who, according to the book of Kings, had long since been translated

[1] Vv. 5–10; cf. 2 Kings viii. 17–22.

[2] xxi. 11–19, peculiar to Chronicles.

[3] So R.V. marg., with LXX. and Vulgate. A.R.V. have "mountains," with Masoretic text.

to heaven. In the older narrative Elijah's work is exclusively confined to the northern kingdom. But the chronicler entirely ignores Elijah, except when his history becomes connected for a moment with that of the house of David.

The other prophets of Judah delivered their messages by word of mouth, but this communication is made by means of "a writing." This, however, is not without parallel: Jeremiah sent a letter to the captives in Babylon, and also sent a written collection of his prophecies to Jehoiakim.[1] In the latter case, however, the prophecies had been originally promulgated by word of mouth.

Elijah writes in the name of Jehovah, the God of David, and condemns Jehoram because he was not walking in the ways of Asa and Jehoshaphat, but in the ways of the kings of Israel and the house of Ahab. It is pleasant to find that, in spite of the sins which marked the latter days of Asa and Jehoshaphat, their "ways" were as a whole such as could be held up as an example by the prophet of Jehovah. Here and elsewhere God appeals to the better feelings that spring from pride of birth. *Noblesse oblige.* Jehoram held his throne as representative of the house of David, and was proud to trace his descent to the founder of the Israelite monarchy and to inherit the glory of the great reigns of Asa and Jehoshaphat; but this pride of race implied that to depart from their ways was dishonourable apostacy. There is no more pitiful spectacle than an effeminate libertine pluming himself on his noble ancestry.

Elijah further rebukes Jehoram for the massacre of

[1] Jer. xxix.; xxxvi.

his brethren, who were better than himself. They had all grown up at their father's court, and till the other brethren were put in possession of their fenced cities had been under the same influences. It is the husband of Ahab's daughter who is worse than all the rest; the influence of an unsuitable marriage has already begun to show itself. Indeed, in view of Athaliah's subsequent history, we do her no injustice by supposing that, like Jezebel and Lady Macbeth, she had suggested her husband's crime. The fact that Jehoram's brethren were better men than himself adds to his guilt morally, but this undesirable superiority of the other princes of the blood to the reigning sovereign would seem to Jehoram and his advisers an additional reason for putting them out of the way; the massacre was an urgent political necessity.

> "Truly the tender mercies of the weak,
> As of the wicked, are but cruel."

There is nothing so cruel as the terror of a selfish man. The Inquisition is the measure not only of the inhumanity, but also of the weakness, of the mediæval Church; and the massacre of St. Bartholomew was due to the feebleness of Charles IX. as well as to the "revenge or the blind instinct of self-preservation"[1] of Mary de Medici.

The chronicler's condemnation of Jehoram's massacre marks the superiority of the standard of later Judaism to the current Oriental morality. For his sins Jehoram was to be punished by sore disease and by a great "plague" which would fall upon his people, and his

[1] Green's *Shorter History*, p. 404.

wives, and his children, and all his substance. From the following verses we see that "plague," here as in the case of some of the plagues of Egypt, has the sense of calamity generally, and not the narrower meaning of pestilence. This plague took the form of an invasion of the Philistines and of the Arabians "which are beside the Ethiopians." Divine inspiration prompted them to attack Judah; Jehovah stirred up their spirit against Jehoram. Probably here, as in the story of Zerah, the term Ethiopians is used loosely for the Egyptians, in which case the Arabs in question would be inhabitants of the desert between the south of Palestine and Egypt, and would thus be neighbours of their Philistine allies.

These marauding bands succeeded where the huge hosts of Zerah had failed; they broke into Judah, and carried off all the king's treasure, together with his sons and his wives, only leaving him his youngest son: Jehoahaz or Ahaziah. They afterwards slew the princes they had taken captive.[1] The common people would scarcely suffer less severely than their king. Jehoram himself was reserved for special personal punishment: Jehovah smote him with a sore disease; and, like Asa, he lingered for two years and then died. The people were so impressed by his wickedness that "they made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers," whereas they had made a very great burning for Asa.[2]

[1] xxii. 1 *b*, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] The Hebrew original of the A.R.V., "departed without being desired," is as obscure as the English of our versions. The most probable translation is, "He behaved so as to please no one." The A.R.V. apparently mean that no one regretted his death.

The chronicler's account of the reign of Ahaziah[1] does not differ materially from that given by the book of Kings, though it is considerably abridged, and there are other minor alterations. The chronicler sets forth even more emphatically than the earlier history the evil influence of Athaliah and her Israelite kinsfolk over Ahaziah's short reign of one year. The story of his visit to Jehoram, king of Israel, and the murder of the two kings by Jehu, is very much abridged. The chronicler carefully omits all reference to Elisha, according to his usual principle of ignoring the religious life of Northern Israel; but he expressly tells us that, like Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah suffered for consorting with the house of Omri: "His destruction or treading down was of God in that he went unto Jehoram." Our English versions have carefully reproduced an ambiguity in the original; but it seems probable that the chronicler does not mean that visiting Jehoram in his illness was a flagrant offence which God punished with death, but rather that, to punish Ahaziah for his imitation of the evil-doings of the house of Omri,[2] God allowed him to visit Jehoram in order that he might share the fate of the Israelite king.

The book of Kings had stated that Jehu slew forty-two brethren of Ahaziah. It is, of course, perfectly

[1] We need not discuss in detail the question of Ahaziah's age at his accession. The age of forty-two, given in 2 Chron. xxii. 2, is simply impossible, seeing that his father was only forty years old when he died. The Peshito and Arabic versions have followed 2 Kings viii. 26, and altered forty-two to twenty-two; and the LXX. reads twenty years. But twenty-two years still presents difficulties. According to this reading, Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, was born when his father was only eighteen, and Jehoram having had several sons before the age of eighteen, had none afterwards.

[2] xxii. 7 *a*, peculiar to Chronicles.

allowable to take "brethren" in the general sense of "kinsmen"; but as the chronicler had recently mentioned the massacre of all Ahaziah's brethren, he avoids even the appearance of a contradiction by substituting "sons of the brethren of Ahaziah" for brethren. This alteration introduces new difficulties, but these difficulties simply illustrate the general confusion of numbers and ages which characterises the narrative at this point. In connection with the burial of Ahaziah, it may be noted that the popular recollection of Jehoshaphat endorsed the favourable judgment contained in the "writing of Elijah": "They said" of Ahaziah, "He is the son of Jehoshaphat, who sought Jehovah with all his heart."

The chronicler next narrates Athaliah's murder of the seed royal of Judah and her usurpation of the throne of David, in terms almost identical with those of the narrative in the book of Kings. But his previous additions and modifications are hard to reconcile with the account he here borrows from his ancient authority. According to the chronicler, Jehoram had massacred all the other sons of Jehoshaphat, and the Arabians had slain all Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah, and Jehu had slain their sons; so that Ahaziah was the only living descendant in the male line of his grandfather Jehoshaphat; he himself apparently died at the age of twenty-three. It is intelligible enough that he should have a son Joash and possibly other sons; but still it is difficult to understand where Athaliah found "all the seed royal" and "the king's sons" whom she put to death. It is at any rate clear that Jehoram's slaughter of his brethren met with an appropriate punishment: all his own sons and grandsons were similarly slain, except the child Joash.

The chronicler's narrative of the revolution by which

Athaliah was slain, and the throne recovered for the house of David in the person of Joash, follows substantially the earlier history, the chief difference being, as we have already noticed,[1] that the chronicler substitutes the Levitical guard of the second Temple for the bodyguard of foreign mercenaries who were the actual agents in this revolution.

A distinguished authority on European history is fond of pointing to the evil effects of royal marriages as one of the chief drawbacks to the monarchical system of government. A crown may at any time devolve upon a woman, and by her marriage with a powerful reigning prince her country may virtually be subjected to a foreign yoke. If it happens that the new sovereign professes a different religion from that of his wife's subjects, the evils arising from the marriage are seriously aggravated. Some such fate befell the Netherlands as the result of the marriage of Mary of Burgundy with the Emperor Maximilian, and England was only saved from the danger of transference to Catholic dominion by the caution and patriotism of Queen Elizabeth.

Athaliah's usurpation was a bold attempt to reverse the usual process and transfer the husband's dominions to the authority and faith of the wife's family. It is probable that Athaliah's permanent success would have led to the absorption of Judah in the northern kingdom. This last misfortune was averted by the energy and courage of Jehoiada, but in the meantime the half-heathen queen had succeeded in causing untold harm and suffering to her adopted country. Our own history furnishes numerous illustrations of the evil influences that come in the train of foreign queens. Edward II.

[1] Cf. p. 20

suffered grievously at the hands of his French queen; Henry VI.'s wife, Margaret of Anjou, contributed considerably to the prolonged bitterness of the struggle between York and Lancaster; and to Henry VIII.'s marriage with Catherine of Aragon the country owed the miseries and persecutions inflicted by Mary Tudor. But, on the other hand, many of the foreign princesses who have shared the English throne have won the lasting gratitude of the nation. A French queen of Kent, for instance, opened the way for Augustine's mission to England.

But no foreign queen of England has had the opportunities for mischief that were enjoyed and fully utilised by Athaliah. She corrupted her husband and her son, and she was probably at once the instigator of their crimes and the instrument of their punishment. By corrupting the rulers of Judah and by her own misgovernment, she exercised an evil influence over the nation; and as the people suffered, not for their sins only, but also for those of their kings, Athaliah brought misfortunes and calamity upon Judah. Unfortunately such experiences are not confined to royal families; the peace and honour, and prosperity of godly families in all ranks of life have been disturbed and often destroyed by the marriage of one of their members with a woman of alien spirit and temperament. Here is a very general and practical application of the chronicler's objection to intercourse with the house of Omri.

CHAPTER VI

JOASH AND AMAZIAH

2 CHRON. xxiv.–xxv

FOR Chronicles, as for the book of Kings, the main interest of the reign of Joash is the repairing of the Temple; but the later narrative introduces modifications which give a somewhat different complexion to the story. Both authorities tell us that Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah all the days of Jehoiada, but the book of Kings immediately adds that "the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places."[1] Seeing that Jehoiada exercised the royal authority during the minority of Joash, this toleration of the high places must have had the sanction of the high-priest. Now the chronicler and his contemporaries had been educated in the belief that the Pentateuch was the ecclesiastical code of the monarchy; they found it impossible to credit a statement that the high-priest had sanctioned any other sanctuary besides the temple of Zion; accordingly they omitted the verse in question.

In the earlier narrative of the repairing of the Temple

[1] Cf. xxv. 2 with 2 Kings xiv. 4, xxvi. 4 with 2 Kings xv. 4, xxvii. 2 with 2 Kings xv. 34, where similar statements are omitted by the chronicler.

the priests are ordered by Joash to use certain sacred dues and offerings to repair the breaches of the house; but after some time had elapsed it was found that the breaches had not been repaired: and when Joash remonstrated with the priests, they flatly refused to have anything to do with the repairs or with receiving funds for the purpose. Their objections were, however, overruled; and Jehoiada placed beside the altar a chest with a hole in the lid, into which "the priests put all the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah."[1] When it was sufficiently full, the king's scribe and the high-priest counted the money, and put it up in bags.

There were several points in this earlier narrative which would have furnished very inconvenient precedents, and were so much out of keeping with the ideas and practices of the second Temple that, by the time the chronicler wrote, a new and more intelligible version of the story was current among the ministers of the Temple. To begin with, there was an omission which would have grated very unpleasantly on the feelings of the chronicler. In this long narrative, wholly taken up with the affairs of the Temple, nothing is said about the Levites. The collecting and receiving of money might well be supposed to belong to them; and accordingly in Chronicles the Levites are first associated with the priests in this matter, and then the priests drop out of the narrative, and the Levites alone carry out the financial arrangements.

Again, it might be understood from the book of Kings that sacred dues and offerings, which formed the revenue of the priests and Levites, were diverted by

[1] 2 Kings xii. 9.

the king's orders to the repair of the fabric. The chronicler was naturally anxious that there should be no mistake on this point; the ambiguous phrases are omitted, and it is plainly indicated that funds were raised for the repairs by means of a special tax ordained by Moses. Joash "assembled the priests and the Levites, and said to them, Go out into the cities of Judah, and gather of all Israel money to repair the house of your God from year to year, and see that ye hasten the matter. Howbeit the Levites hastened it not." The remissness of the priests in the original narrative is here very faithfully and candidly transferred to the Levites. Then, as in the book of Kings, Joash remonstrates with Jehoiada, but the terms of his remonstrance are altogether different: here he complains because the Levites have not been required "to bring in out of Judah and out of Jerusalem the tax appointed by Moses the servant of Jehovah and by the congregation of Israel for the tent of the testimony," *i.e.*, the Tabernacle, containing the Ark and the tables of the Law. The reference apparently is to the law[1] that when a census was taken a poll-tax of a half-shekel a head should be paid for the service of the Tabernacle. As one of the main uses of a census was to facilitate the raising of taxes, this law might not unfairly be interpreted to mean that when occasion arose, or perhaps even every year, a census should be taken in order that this poll-tax might be levied. Nehemiah arranged for a yearly poll-tax of a third of a shekel for the incidental expenses of the Temple.[2] Here, however, the half-shekel prescribed in Exodus is intended; and it should be observed that this poll-tax

[1] Exod. xxx. 11–16.

[2] Neh. x. 32.

was to be levied, not once only, but "from year to year." The chronicler then inserts a note to explain why these repairs were necessary: "The sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of Jehovah they bestowed upon the Baals." Here we are confronted with a further difficulty. All Jehoram's sons except Ahaziah were murdered by the Arabs in their father's life-time. Who are these "sons of Athaliah" who broke up the Temple? Jehoram was about thirty-seven when his sons were massacred, so that some of them may have been old enough to break up the Temple. One would think that "the dedicated things" might have been recovered for Jehovah when Athaliah was overthrown; but possibly, when the people retaliated by breaking into the house of Baal, there were Achans among them, who appropriated the plunder.

Having remonstrated with Jehoiada, the king took matters into his own hands; and he, not Jehoiada, had a chest made and placed, not beside the altar—such an arrangement savoured of profanity—but without at the gate of the Temple. This little touch is very suggestive. The noise and bustle of paying over money, receiving it, and putting it into the chest, would have mingled distractingly with the solemn ritual of sacrifice. In modern times the tinkle of threepenny pieces often tends to mar the effect of an impressive appeal and to disturb the quiet influences of a communion service. The Scotch arrangement, by which a plate covered with a fair white cloth is placed in the porch of a church and guarded by two modern Levites or elders, is much more in accordance with Chronicles.

Then, instead of sending out Levites to collect the

tax, proclamation was made that the people themselves should bring their offerings. Obedience apparently was made a matter of conscience, not of solicitation. Perhaps it was because the Levites felt that sacred dues should be given freely that they were not forward to make yearly tax-collecting expeditions. At any rate, the new method was signally successful. Day after day the princes and people gladly brought their offerings, and money was gathered in abundance. Other passages suggest that the chronicler was not always inclined to trust to the spontaneous generosity of the people for the support of the priests and Levites; but he plainly recognised that free-will offerings are more excellent than the donations which are painfully extracted by the yearly visits of official collectors. He would probably have sympathised with the abolition of pew-rents.

As in the book of Kings, the chest was emptied at suitable intervals; but instead of the high-priest being associated with the king's scribe, as if they were on a level and both of them officials of the royal court, the chief priest's *officer* assists the king's *scribe*, so that the chief priest is placed on a level with the king himself.

The details of the repairs in the two narratives differ considerably in form, but for the most part agree in substance; the only striking point is that they are apparently at variance as to whether vessels of silver or gold were or were not made for the renovated Temple.

Then follows the account[1] of the ingratitude and apostacy of Joash and his people. As long as Jehoiada lived, the services of the Temple were regularly per-

[1] xxiv. 14–22, peculiar to Chronicles

formed, and Judah remained faithful to its God; but at last he died, full of days: a hundred and thirty years old. In his life-time he had exercised royal authority, and when he died he was buried like a king: "They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel and toward God and His house."[1] Like Nero when he shook off the control of Seneca and Burrhus, Joash changed his policy as soon as Jehoiada was dead. Apparently he was a weak character, always following some one's leading. His freedom from the influence that had made his early reign decent and honourable was not, as in Nero's case, his own act. The change of policy was adopted at the suggestion of the princes of Judah. King, princes, and people fell back into the old wickedness; they forsook the Temple and served idols. Yet Jehovah did not readily give them up to their own folly, nor hastily inflict punishment; He sent, not one prophet, but many, to bring them back to Himself, but they would not hearken. At last Jehovah made one last effort to win Joash back; this time He chose for His messenger a priest who had special personal claims on the favourable attention of the king. The prophet was Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, to whom Joash owed his life and his throne. The name was a favourite one in Israel, and was borne by two other prophets besides the son of Jehoiada. Its very etymology constituted an appeal to the conscience of Joash: it is compounded of the sacred name and a root meaning "to remember." The Jews were adepts at extracting from such a combination all its possible applications.

[1] Curiously enough, Jehoiada's name does not occur in the list of high-priests in 1 Chron. vi. 1–12.

The most obvious was that Jehovah would remember the sin of Judah, but the recent prophets sent to recall the sinners to their God showed that Jehovah also remembered their former righteousness and desired to recall it to them and them to it; they should remember Jehovah. Moreover, Joash should remember the teaching of Jehoiada and his obligations to the father of the man now addressing him. Probably Joash did remember all this when, in the striking Hebrew idiom, "the spirit of God clothed itself with Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people and said unto them, Thus saith God: Why transgress ye the commandments of Jehovah, to your hurt? Because ye have forsaken Jehovah, He hath also forsaken you." This is the burden of the prophetic utterances in Chronicles[1]; the converse is stated by Irenæus when he says that to follow the Saviour is to partake of salvation. Though the truth of this teaching had been enforced again and again by the misfortunes that had befallen Judah under apostate kings, Joash paid no heed to it, nor did he remember the kindness which Jehoiada had done him; that is to say, he showed no gratitude towards the house of Jehoiada. Perhaps an uncomfortable sense of obligation to the father only embittered him the more against his son. But the son of the high-priest could not be dealt with as summarily as Asa dealt with Hanani when he put him in prison. The king might have been indifferent to the wrath of Jehovah, but the son of the man who had for years ruled Judah and Jerusalem must have had a strong party at his back.

[1] 1 Chron. xxviii. 9; 2 Chron. vii. 19, xii. 5, xiii. 10, xv. 2, xxi. 10, xxviii. 6, xxix. 6, xxxiv. 25.

Accordingly the king and his adherents conspired against Zechariah, and they stoned him with stones by the king's command. This Old Testament martyr died in a very different spirit from that of Stephen; his prayer was, not, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," but "Jehovah, look upon it and require it." His prayer did not long remain unanswered. Within a year the Syrians[1] came against Joash; he had a very great host, but he was powerless against a small company of the Divinely commissioned avengers of Zechariah. The tempters who had seduced the king into apostacy were a special mark for the wrath of Jehovah: the Syrians destroyed all the princes, and sent their spoil to the king of Damascus. Like Asa and Jehoram, Joash suffered personal punishment in the shape of "great diseases," but his end was even more tragic than theirs. One conspiracy avenged another: in his own household there were adherents of the family of Jehoiada: "Two of his own servants conspired against him for the blood of Zechariah, and slew him on his bed; and they buried him in the city of David, and not in the sepulchres of the kings."

The chronicler's biography of Joash might have been specially designed to remind his readers that the most careful education must sometimes fail of its purpose. Joash had been trained from his earliest years in the Temple itself, under the care of Jehoiada and of his aunt Jehoshabeath, the high-priest's wife. He had no doubt been carefully instructed in the religion and sacred history of Israel, and had been continually surrounded by the best religious influences of his age. For

[1] Cf. 2 Kings xii. 17, 18, of which this narrative is probably an adaptation.

Judah, in the chronicler's estimation, was even then the one home of the true faith. These holy influences had been continued after Joash had attained to manhood, and Jehoiada was careful to provide that the young king's harem should be enlisted in the cause of piety and good government. We may be sure that the two wives whom Jehoiada selected for his pupil were consistent worshippers of Jehovah and loyal to the Law and the Temple. No daughter of the house of Ahab, no "strange wife" from Egypt, Ammon, or Moab, would be allowed the opportunity of undoing the good effects of early training. Moreover, we might have expected the character developed by education to be strengthened by exercise. The early years of his reign were occupied by zealous activity in the service of the Temple. The pupil outstripped his master, and the enthusiasm of the youthful king found occasion to rebuke the tardy zeal of the venerable high-priest.

And yet all this fair promise was blighted in a day. The piety carefully fostered for half a life-time gave way before the first assaults of temptation, and never even attempted to reassert itself. Possibly the brief and fragmentary records from which the chronicler had to make his selection unduly emphasise the contrast between the earlier and later years of the reign of Joash; but the picture he draws of the failure of best of tutors and governors is unfortunately only too typical. Julian the Apostate was educated by a distinguished Christian prelate, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and was trained in a strict routine of religious observances; yet he repudiated Christianity at the earliest safe opportunity. His apostacy, like that of Joash, was probably characterised by base ingratitude. At Constantine's death the troops in Constantinople

massacred nearly all the princes of the imperial family, and Julian, then only six years old, is said to have been saved and concealed in a church by Mark, Bishop of Arethusa. When Julian became emperor, he repaid this obligation by subjecting his benefactor to cruel tortures because he had destroyed a heathen temple and refused to make any compensation. Imagine Joash requiring Jehoiada to make compensation for pulling down a high place!

The parallel of Julian may suggest a partial explanation of the fall of Joash. The tutelage of Jehoiada may have been too strict, monotonous, and prolonged; in choosing wives for the young king, the aged priest may not have made an altogether happy selection; Jehoiada may have kept Joash under control until he was incapable of independence and could only pass from one dominant influence to another. When the high-priest's death gave the king an opportunity of changing his masters, a reaction from the too urgent insistence upon his duty to the Temple may have inclined Joash to listen favourably to the solicitations of the princes.

But perhaps the sins of Joash are sufficiently accounted for by his ancestry. His mother was Zibiah of Beersheba, and therefore probably a Jewess. Of her we know nothing further good or bad. Otherwise his ancestors for two generations had been uniformly bad. His father and grandfather were the wicked kings Jehoram and Ahaziah; his grandmother was Athaliah; and he was descended from Ahab, and possibly from Jezebel. When we recollect that his mother Zibiah was a wife of Ahaziah and had probably been selected by Athaliah, we cannot suppose that the element she contributed to his character would do much to counteract the evil he inherited from his father.

The chronicler's account of his successor Amaziah is equally disappointing; he also began well and ended miserably. In the opening formulæ of the history of the new reign and in the account of the punishment of the assassins of Joash, the chronicler closely follows the earlier narrative, omitting, as usual, the statement that this good king did not take away the high places. Like his pious predecessors, Amaziah in his earlier and better years was rewarded with a great army[1] and military success; and yet the muster-roll of his forces shows how the sins and calamities of the recent wicked reigns had told on the resources of Judah. Jehoshaphat could command more than eleven hundred and sixty thousand soldiers; Amaziah has only three hundred thousand.

These were not sufficient for the king's ambition; by the Divine grace, he had already amassed wealth, in spite of the Syrian ravages at the close of the preceding reign: and he laid out a hundred talents of silver in purchasing the services of as many thousand Israelites, thus falling into the sin for which Jehoshaphat had twice been reproved and punished. Jehovah, however, arrested Amaziah's employment of unholy allies at the outset. A man of God came to him and exhorted him not to let the army of Israel go with him, because "Jehovah is not with Israel"; if he had courage and faith to go with only his three hundred thousand Jews, all would be well, otherwise God would cast him down, as He had done Ahaziah. The statement that Jehovah was not with Israel might have been understood in a sense that would seem almost blasphemous to the

[1] xxv. 5–13, peculiar to Chronicles, except that the account of the war with Edom is expanded from the brief note in Kings. Cf. ver. 11 *b* with 2 Kings xiv. 7.

chronicler's contemporaries; he is careful therefore to explain that here "Israel" simply means "the children of Ephraim."

Amaziah obeyed the prophet, but was naturally distressed at the thought that he had spent a hundred talents for nothing: "What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?" He did not realise that the Divine alliance would be worth more to him than many hundred talents of silver; or perhaps he reflected that Divine grace is free, and that he might have saved his money. One would like to believe that he was anxious to recover this silver in order to devote it to the service of the sanctuary; but he was evidently one of those sordid souls who like, as the phrase goes, "to get their religion for nothing." No wonder Amaziah went astray! We can scarcely be wrong in detecting a vein of contempt in the prophet's answer: "Jehovah can give thee much more than this."

This little episode carries with it a great principle. Every crusade against an established abuse is met with the cry, "What shall we do for the hundred talents?'—for the capital invested in slaves or in gin-shops; for English revenues from alcohol or Indian revenues from opium? Few have faith to believe that the Lord can provide for financial deficits, or, if we may venture to indicate the method in which the Lord provides, that a nation will ever be able to pay its way by honest finance. Let us note, however, that Amaziah was asked to sacrifice his own talents, and not other people's.

Accordingly Amaziah sent the mercenaries home; and they returned in great dudgeon, offended by the slight put upon them and disappointed at the loss of prospective plunder. The king's sin in hiring Israelite

mercenaries was to suffer a severer punishment than the loss of money. While he was away at war, his rejected allies returned, and attacked the border cities,[1] killed three thousand Jews, and took much plunder.

Meanwhile Amaziah and his army were reaping direct fruits of their obedience in Edom, where they gained a great victory, and followed it up by a massacre of ten thousand captives, whom they killed by throwing down from the top of a precipice. Yet, after all, Amaziah's victory over Edom was of small profit to him, for he was thereby seduced into idolatry. Amongst his other prisoners, he had brought away the gods of Edom; and instead of throwing them over a precipice, as a pious king should have done, "he set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense unto them."

Then Jehovah, in His anger, sent a prophet to demand, "Why hast thou sought after foreign gods, which have not delivered their own people out of thine hand?" According to current ideas outside of Israel, a nation might very reasonably seek after the gods of their conquerors. Such conquest could only be attributed to the superior power and grace of the gods of the victors: the gods of the defeated were vanquished along with their worshippers, and were obviously incompetent and unworthy of further confidence. But to act like Amaziah—to go out to battle in the name of Jehovah, directed and encouraged by His prophet, to conquer by the grace of the God of Israel, and then to desert Jehovah of hosts, the Giver of victory, for

[1] In the phrase "from Samaria to Beth-horon," "Samaria" apparently means the northern kingdom, and not the city, *i.e.*, from the borders of Samaria; the chronicler has fallen into the nomenclature of his own age.

the paltry and discredited idols of the conquered Edomites—this was sheer madness. And yet as Greece enslaved her Roman conquerors, so the victor has often been won to the faith of the vanquished. The Church subdued the barbarians who had overwhelmed the empire, and the heathen Saxons adopted at last the religion of the conquered Britons. Henry IV. of France is scarcely a parallel to Amaziah: he went to mass that he might hold his sceptre with a firmer grasp, while the king of Judah merely adopted foreign idols in order to gratify his superstition and love of novelty.

Apparently Amaziah was at first inclined to discuss the question: he and the prophet talked together; but the king soon became irritated, and broke off the interview with abrupt discourtesy: "Have we made thee of the king's counsel? Forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten?" Prosperity seems to have been invariably fatal to the Jewish kings who began to reign well; the success that rewarded, at the same time destroyed their virtue. Before his victory Amaziah had been courteous and submissive to the messenger of Jehovah; now he defied Him and treated His prophet roughly. The latter disappeared, but not before he had declared the Divine condemnation of the stubborn king.

The rest of the history of Amaziah—his presumptuous war with Joash, king of Israel, his defeat and degradation, and his assassination—is taken verbatim from the book of Kings, with a few modifications and editorial notes by the chronicler to harmonise these sections with the rest of his narrative. For instance, in the book of Kings the account of the war with Joash begins somewhat abruptly: Amaziah sends his defiance before

any reason has been given for his action. The chronicler inserts a phrase which connects his new paragraph very suggestively with the one that goes before. The former concluded with the king's taunt that the prophet was not of his counsel, to which the prophet replied that the king should be destroyed because he had not hearkened to the Divine counsel proffered to him. Then Amaziah "took advice"; *i.e.*, he consulted those who were of his counsel, and the sequel showed their incompetence. The chronicler also explains that Amaziah's rash persistence in his challenge to Joash "was of God, that He might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought after the gods of Edom." He also tells us that the name of the custodian of the sacred vessels of the Temple was Obed-edom. As the chronicler mentions five Levites of the name of Obed-edom, four of whom occur nowhere else, the name was probably common in some family still surviving in his own time. But, in view of the fondness of the Jews for significant etymology, it is probable that the name is recorded here because it was exceedingly appropriate. "The servant of Edom" suits the official who has to surrender his sacred charge to a conqueror because his own king had worshipped the gods of Edom. Lastly, an additional note explains that Amaziah's apostacy had promptly deprived him of the confidence and loyalty of his subjects; the conspiracy which led to his assassination was formed from the time that he turned away from following Jehovah, so that when he sent his proud challenge to Joash his authority was already undermined, and there were traitors in the army which he led against Israel. We are shown one of the means used by Jehovah to bring about his defeat.

CHAPTER VII

UZZIAH, JOTHAM, AND AHAZ[1]

2 CHRON. xxvi.-xxviii.

AFTER the assassination of Amaziah, all the people of Judah took his son Uzziah, a lad of sixteen, called in the book of Kings Azariah, and made him king. The chronicler borrows from the older narrative the statement that "Uzziah did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Amaziah had done." In the light of the sins attributed both to Amaziah and Uzziah in Chronicles, this is a somewhat doubtful compliment. Sarcasm, however, is not one of the chronicler's failings; he simply allows the older history to speak for itself, and leaves the reader to combine its judgment with the statement of later tradition as best he can. But yet we might modify this verse, and read that Uzziah did good and evil, prospered and fell into misfortune, according to all that his father Amaziah had done, or an even closer parallel might be drawn between what Uzziah did and suffered and the chequered character and fortunes of Joash.

Though much older than the latter, at his accession Uzziah was young enough to be very much under

[1] For the discussion of the chronicler's account of Ahaz see Book III., Chap. VII.

the control of ministers and advisers; and as Joash was trained in loyalty to Jehovah by the high-priest Jehoiada, so Uzziah "set himself to seek God during the life-time" of a certain prophet, who, like the son of Jehoiada, was named Zechariah, "who had understanding or gave instruction in the fear of Jehovah,"[1] *i.e.*, a man versed in sacred learning, rich in spiritual experience, and able to communicate his knowledge, such a one as Ezra the scribe in later days.

Under the guidance of this otherwise unknown prophet, the young king was led to conform his private life and public administration to the will of God. In "seeking God," Uzziah would be careful to maintain and attend the Temple services, to honour the priests of Jehovah and make due provision for their wants; and "as long as he sought Jehovah God gave him prosperity."

Uzziah received all the rewards usually bestowed upon pious kings: he was victorious in war, and exacted tribute from neighbouring states; he built fortresses, and had abundance of cattle and slaves, a large and well-equipped army, and well-supplied arsenals. Like other powerful kings of Judah, he asserted his supremacy over the tribes along the southern frontier of his kingdom. God helped him against the Philistines, the Arabians of Gur-baal, and the Meunim. He destroyed the fortifications of Gath, Jabne, and Ashdod, and built forts of his own in the country of the

[1] So R.V. marg., with LXX., Targum, Syriac and Arabic versions, Talmud, Rashi, Kimchi, and some Hebrew manuscripts (Bertheau, i. 1). A.R.V., "had understanding in the visions" (R.V. vision) "of God." The difference between the two Hebrew readings is very slight. Vv. 5–20, with the exception of the bare fact of the leprosy are peculiar to Chronicles.

Philistines. Nothing is known about Gur-baal; but the Arabian allies of the Philistines would be, like Jehoram's enemies "the Arabians who dwelt near the Ethiopians," nomads of the deserts south of Judah. These Philistines and Arabians had brought tribute to Jehoshaphat without waiting to be subdued by his armies; so now the Ammonites gave gifts to Uzziah, and his name spread abroad "even to the entering in of Egypt," possibly a hundred or even a hundred and fifty miles from Jerusalem. It is evident that the chronicler's ideas of international politics were of very modest dimensions.

Moreover, Uzziah added to the fortifications of Jerusalem; and because he loved husbandry and had cattle, and husbandmen, and vine-dressers in the open country and outlying districts of Judah, he built towers for their protection. His army was of about the same strength as that of Amaziah, three hundred thousand men, so that in this, as in his character and exploits, he did according to all that his father had done, except that he was content with his own Jewish warriors and did not waste his talents in purchasing worse than useless reinforcements from Israel. Uzziah's army was well disciplined, carefully organised, and constantly employed; they were men of mighty power, and went out to war by bands, to collect the king's tribute and enlarge his dominions and revenue by new conquests. The war material in his arsenals is described at greater length than that of any previous king: shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows and stones for slings. The great advance of military science in Uzziah's reign was marked by the invention of engines of war for the defence of Jerusalem; some, like the Roman *catapulta*, were for arrows, and others, like the *ballista*, to hurl

huge stones. Though the Assyrian sculptures show us that battering-rams were freely employed by them against the walls of Jewish cities,[1] and the *ballista* is said by Pliny to have been invented in Syria,[2] no other Hebrew king is credited with the possession of this primitive artillery. The chronicler or his authority seems profoundly impressed by the great skill displayed in this invention; in describing it, he uses the root *ḥāshabh*, to devise, three times in three consecutive words. The engines were "*ḥishshebhōnôth maḥăshebheth ḥôshēbh*"—"engines engineered by the ingenious." Jehovah not only provided Uzziah with ample military resources of every kind, but also blessed the means which He Himself had furnished; Uzziah "was marvellously helped, till he was strong, and his name spread far abroad." The neighbouring states heard with admiration of his military resources.

The student of Chronicles will by this time be prepared for the invariable sequel to God-given prosperity. Like David, Rehoboam, Asa, and Amaziah, when Uzziah "was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction." The most powerful of the kings of Judah died a leper. An attack of leprosy admitted of only one explanation: it was a plague inflicted by Jehovah Himself as the punishment of sin; and so the book of Kings tells us that "Jehovah smote the king," but says nothing about the sin thus punished. The chronicler was able to supply the omission: Uzziah had dared to go into the Temple and with irregular zeal to burn incense on the altar of incense. In so doing, he was violating the Law, which made the priestly office

[1] Cf. Ezek. xxvi. 9.

[2] Pliny, vii. 56, *apud* Smith's *Bible Dictionary*.

and all priestly functions the exclusive prerogative of the house of Aaron and denounced the penalty of death against any one who usurped priestly functions.[1] But Uzziah was not allowed to carry out his unholy design; the high-priest Azariah went in after him with eighty stalwart colleagues, rebuked his presumption, and bade him leave the sanctuary. Uzziah was no more tractable to the admonitions of the priest than Asa and Amaziah had been to those of the prophets. The kings of Judah were accustomed, even in Chronicles, to exercise an unchallenged control over the Temple and to regard the high-priests very much in the light of private chaplains. Uzziah was wroth; he was at the zenith of his power and glory; his heart was lifted up. Who were these priests, that they should stand between him and Jehovah and dare to publicly check and rebuke him in his own temple? Henry II.'s feelings towards Becket must have been mild compared to those of Uzziah towards Azariah, who, if the king could have had his way, would doubtless have shared the fate of Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. But a direct intervention of Jehovah protected the priests, and preserved Uzziah from further sacrilege. While his features were convulsed with anger, leprosy brake forth in his forehead. The contest between king and priest was at once ended; the priests thrust him out, and he himself hasted to go, recognising that Jehovah had smitten him. Henceforth he lived apart, cut off from fellowship alike with man and God, and his son Jotham governed in his stead. The book of Kings simply makes the general statement that Uzziah was buried with his fathers in the city of David; but the

[1] Num. xviii. 7; Exod. xxx. 7.

chronicler is anxious that his readers should not suppose that the tombs of the sacred house of David were polluted by the presence of a leprous corpse: he explains that the leper was buried, not in the royal sepulchre, but in the field attached to it.

The moral of this incident is obvious. In attempting to understand its significance, we need not trouble ourselves about the relative authority of kings and priests; the principle vindicated by the punishment of Uzziah was the simple duty of obedience to an express command of Jehovah. However trivial the burning of incense may be in itself, it formed part of an elaborate and complicated system of ritual. To interfere with the Divine ordinances in one detail would mar the significance and impressiveness of the whole Temple service. One arbitrary innovation would be a precedent for others, and would constitute a serious danger for a system whose value lay in continuous uniformity. Moreover, Uzziah was stubborn in disobedience. His attempt to burn incense might have been sufficiently punished by the public and humiliating reproof of the high-priest. His leprosy came upon him because when thwarted in an unholy purpose he gave way to ungoverned passion.

In its consequences we see a practical application of the lessons of the incident. How often is the sinner only provoked to greater wickedness by the obstacles which Divine grace opposes to his wrong-doing! How few men will tolerate the suggestion that their intentions are cruel, selfish, or dishonourable! Remonstrance is an insult, an offence against their personal dignity; they feel that their self-respect demands that they should persevere in their purpose, and that they should resent and punish any one who

has tried to thwart them. Uzziah's wrath was perfectly natural; few men have been so uniformly patient of reproof as not sometimes to have turned in anger upon those who warned them against sin. The most dramatic feature of this episode, the sudden frost of leprosy in the king's forehead, is not without its spiritual antitype. Men's anger at well-merited reproof has often blighted their lives once for all with ineradicable moral leprosy. In the madness of passion they have broken bonds which have hitherto restrained them and committed themselves beyond recall to evil pursuits and fatal friendships. Let us take the most lenient view of Uzziah's conduct, and suppose that he believed himself entitled to offer incense; he could not doubt that the priests were equally confident that Jehovah had enjoined the duty on them, and them alone. Such a question was not to be decided by violence, in the heat of personal bitterness. Azariah himself had been unwisely zealous in bringing in his eighty priests; Jehovah showed him that they were quite unnecessary, because at the last Uzziah "himself hasted to go out." When personal passion and jealousy are eliminated from Christian polemics, the Church will be able to write the epitaph of the *odium theologicum.*

Uzziah was succeeded by Jotham, who had already governed for some time as regent. In recording the favourable judgment of the book of Kings, "He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that his father Uzziah had done," the chronicler is careful to add, "Howbeit he entered not into the temple of Jehovah"; the exclusive privilege of the house of Aaron had been established once for all. The story of Jotham's reign comes like a quiet and pleasant oasis

in the chronicler's dreary narrative of wicked rulers, interspersed with pious kings whose piety failed them in their latter days. Jotham shares with Solomon the distinguished honour of being a king of whom no evil is recorded either in Kings or Chronicles, and who died in prosperity, at peace with Jehovah. At the same time it is probable that Jotham owes the blameless character he bears in Chronicles to the fact that the earlier narrative does not mention any misfortunes of his, especially any misfortune towards the close of his life. Otherwise the theological school from whom the chronicler derived his later traditions would have been anxious to discover or deduce some sin to account for such misfortune. At the end of the short notice of his reign, between two parts of the usual closing formula, an editor of the book of Kings has inserted the statement that "in those days Jehovah began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah." This verse the chronicler has omitted; neither the date[1] nor the nature of this trouble was clear enough to cast any slur upon the character of Jotham.

Jotham, again, had the rewards of a pious king: he added a gate to the Temple, and strengthened the wall of Ophel,[2] and built cities and castles in Judah; he made successful war upon Ammon, and received from them an immense tribute—a hundred talents of silver, ten thousand measures of wheat, and as much barley—for three successive years. What happened

[1] Kimchi interprets "those days" as meaning "after the death of Jotham."

[2] The reference to the wall of Ophel is peculiar to Chronicles: indeed, Ophel is only mentioned in Chronicles and Nehemiah; it was the southern spur of Mount Moriah (Neh. iii. 26, 27). Vv. 3 *b*–7 are also peculiar to Chronicles.

afterwards we are not told. It has been suggested that the amounts mentioned were paid in three yearly instalments, or that the three years were at the end of the reign, and the tribute came to an end when Jotham died or when the troubles with Pekah and Rezin began.

We have had repeated occasion to notice that in his accounts of the good kings the chronicler almost always omits the qualifying clause to the effect that they did not take away the high places. He does so here; but, contrary to his usual practice, he inserts a qualifying clause of his own: "The people did yet corruptly." He probably had in view the unmitigated wickedness of the following reign, and was glad to retain the evidence that Ahaz found encouragement and support in his idolatry; he is careful, however, to state the fact so that no shadow of blame falls upon Jotham.

The life of Ahaz has been dealt with elsewhere. Here we need merely repeat that for the sixteen years of his reign Judah was to all appearance utterly given over to every form of idolatry, and was oppressed and brought low by Israel, Syria, and Assyria.

CHAPTER VIII

HEZEKIAH: THE RELIGIOUS VALUE OF MUSIC

2 CHRON. xxix.–xxxii.

THE bent of the chronicler's mind is well illustrated by the proportion of space assigned to ritual by him and by the book of Kings respectively. In the latter a few lines only are devoted to ritual, and the bulk of the space is given to the invasion of Sennacherib, the embassy from Babylon, etc., while in Chronicles ritual occupies about three times as many verses as personal and public affairs.

Hezekiah, though not blameless, was all but perfect in his loyalty to Jehovah. The chronicler reproduces the customary formula for a good king: "He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, according to all that David his father had done"; but his cautious judgment rejects the somewhat rhetorical statement in Kings that "after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him."

Hezekiah's policy was made clear immediately after his accession. His zeal for reformation could tolerate no delay; the first month[1] of the first year of his reign

[1] This is usually understood as Nisan, the first month of the ecclesiastical year.

saw him actively engaged in the good work.[1] It was no light task that lay before him. Not only were there altars in every corner of Jerusalem and idolatrous high places in every city of Judah, but the Temple services had ceased, the lamps were put out, the sacred vessels cut in pieces, the Temple had been polluted and then closed, and the priests and Levites were scattered. Sixteen years of licensed idolatry must have fostered all that was vile in the country, have put wicked men in authority, and created numerous vested interests connected by close ties with idolatry, notably the priests of all the altars and high places. On the other hand, the reign of Ahaz had been an unbroken series of disasters; the people had repeatedly endured the horrors of invasion. His government as time went on must have become more and more unpopular, for when he died he was not buried in the sepulchres of the kings. As idolatry was a prominent feature of his policy, there would be a reaction in favour of the worship of Jehovah, and there would not be wanting true believers to tell the people that their sufferings were a consequence of idolatry. To a large party in Judah Hezekiah's reversal of his father's religious policy would be as welcome as Elizabeth's declaration against Rome was to most Englishmen.

Hezekiah began by opening and repairing the doors of the Temple. Its closed doors had been a symbol of the national repudiation of Jehovah; to reopen them

[1] xxix. 3–xxxi. 21 (the cleansing of the Temple and accompanying feast, Passover, organisation of the priests and Levites) are substantially peculiar to Chronicles, though in a sense they expand 2 Kings xviii. 4–7, because they fulfil the commandments which Jehovah commanded Moses.

was necessarily the first step in the reconciliation of Judah to its God, but only the first step. The doors were open as a sign that Jehovah was invited to return to His people and again to manifest His presence in the Holy of holies, so that through those open doors Israel might have access to Him by means of the priests. But the Temple was as yet no fit place for the presence of Jehovah. With its lamps extinguished, its sacred vessels destroyed, its floors and walls thick with dust and full of all filthiness, it was rather a symbol of the apostacy of Judah. Accordingly Hezekiah sought the help of the Levites. It is true that he is first said to have collected together priests and Levites, but from that point onward the priests are almost entirely ignored.

Hezekiah reminded the Levites of the misdoings of Ahaz and his adherents and the wrath which they had brought upon Judah and Jerusalem; he told them it was his purpose to conciliate Jehovah by making a covenant with Him; he appealed to them as the chosen ministers of Jehovah and His temple to co-operate heartily in this good work.

The Levites responded to his appeal apparently rather in acts than words. No spokesman replies to the king's speech, but with prompt obedience they set about their work forthwith; they arose, Kohathites, sons of Merari, Gershonites, sons of Elizaphan, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—the chronicler has a Homeric fondness for catalogues of high-sounding names—the leaders of all these divisions are duly mentioned. Kohath, Gershon, and Merari are well known as the three great clans of the house of Levi; and here we find the three guilds of singers—Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun—placed on a level with the older clans. Elizaphan

was apparently a division of the clan Kohath,[1] which, like the guilds of singers, had obtained an independent status. The result is to recognise seven divisions of the tribe.

The chiefs of the Levites gathered their brethren together, and having performed the necessary rites of ceremonial cleansing for themselves, went in to cleanse the Temple; that is to say, the priests went into the holy place and the Holy of holies and brought out "all the uncleanness" into the court, and the Levites carried it away to the brook Kidron: but before the building itself could be reached eight days were spent in cleansing the courts, and then the priests went into the Temple itself and spent eight days in cleansing it, in the manner described above. Then they reported to the king that the cleansing was finished, and especially that "all the vessels which King Ahaz cast away" had been recovered and reconsecrated with due ceremony. We were told in the previous chapter that Ahaz had cut to pieces the vessels of the Temple, but these may have been other vessels.

Then Hezekiah celebrated a great dedication feast; seven bullocks, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven he-goats were offered as a sin-offering for the dynasty,[2] for the Temple, for Judah, and (by special command of the king) for all Israel, *i.e.* for the northern tribes as well as for Judah and Benjamin. Apparently this sin-offering was made in silence, but afterwards the king set the Levites and priests in their places with their musical instruments, and when the burnt offering began

[1] Exod. vi. 18, 22; Num. iii. 30, mention Elizaphan as a descendant of Kohath.

[2] So Strack-Zockler, i. 1.

"the song of Jehovah began with the trumpets together with the instruments of David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded," and all this continued till the burnt offering was finished.

When the people had been formally reconciled to Jehovah by this representative national sacrifice, and thus purified from the uncleanness of idolatry and consecrated afresh to their God, they were permitted and invited to make individual sacrifices, thank-offerings and burnt offerings. Each man might enjoy for himself the renewed privilege of access to Jehovah, and obtain the assurance of pardon for his sins, and offer thanksgiving for his own special blessings. And they brought offerings in abundance: seventy bullocks, a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs for a burnt offering; and six hundred oxen and three thousand sheep for thank-offerings. Thus were the Temple services restored and reinaugurated; and Hezekiah and the people rejoiced because they felt that this unpremeditated outburst of enthusiasm was due to the gracious influence of the Spirit of Jehovah.

The chronicler's narrative is somewhat marred by a touch of professional jealousy. According to the ordinary ritual,[1] the offerer flayed the burnt offerings; but for some special reason, perhaps because of the exceptional solemnity of the occasion, this duty now devolved upon the priests. But the burnt offerings were abundant beyond all precedent; the priests were too few for the work, and the Levites were called in to help them, "for the Levites were more upright in heart to purify themselves than the priests." Apparently even in the

[1] Lev. i. 6.

second Temple brethren did not always dwell together in unity.

Hezekiah had now provided for the regular services of the Temple, and had given the inhabitants of Jerusalem a full opportunity of returning to Jehovah; but the people of the provinces were chiefly acquainted with the Temple through the great annual festivals. These, too, had long been in abeyance; and special steps had to be taken to secure their future observance. In order to do this, it was necessary to recall the provincials to their allegiance to Jehovah. Under ordinary circumstances the great festival of the Passover would have been observed in the first month, but at the time appointed for the paschal feast the Temple was still unclean, and the priests and Levites were occupied in its purification. But Hezekiah could not endure that the first year of his reign should be marked by the omission of this great feast. He took counsel with the princes and public assembly—nothing is said about the priests—and they decided to hold the Passover in the second month instead of the first. We gather from casual allusions in vv. 6–8 that the kingdom of Samaria had already come to an end; the people had been carried into captivity, and only a remnant were left in the land.[1] From this point the kings of Judah act as religious heads of the whole nation and territory of Israel. Hezekiah sent invitations to all Israel from Dan to Beersheba. He made special efforts to secure a favourable response from the northern tribes, sending letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, *i.e.*, to the ten tribes under their leadership. He reminded them that their brethren had gone

[1] According to 2 Kings xviii. 10, Samaria was not taken till the *sixth* year of Hezekiah's reign. It is not necessary for an expositor of Chronicles to attempt to harmonise the two accounts.

into captivity because the northern tribes had deserted the Temple; and held out to them the hope that, if they worshipped at the Temple and served Jehovah, they should themselves escape further calamity, and their brethren and children who had gone into captivity should return to their own land.

"So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun." Either Zebulun is used in a broad sense for all the Galilean tribes, or the phrase "from Beersheba to Dan" is merely rhetorical, for to the north, between Zebulun and Dan, lay the territories of Asher and Naphtali. It is to be noticed that the tribes beyond Jordan are nowhere referred to; they had already fallen out of the history of Israel, and were scarcely remembered in the time of the chronicler.

Hezekiah's appeal to the surviving communities of the northern kingdom failed: they laughed his messengers to scorn, and mocked them; but individuals responded to his invitation in such numbers that they are spoken of as "a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun." There were also men of Asher among the northern pilgrims.[1]

The pious enthusiasm of Judah stood out in vivid contrast to the stubborn impenitence of the majority of the ten tribes. By the grace of God, Judah was of one heart to observe the feast appointed by Jehovah through the king and princes, so that there was gathered in Jerusalem a very great assembly of worshippers, surpassing even the great gatherings which the chronicler had witnessed at the annual feasts.

[1] Cf. xxx. 11, 18.

But though the Temple had been cleansed, the Holy City was not yet free from the taint of idolatry. The character of the Passover demanded that not only the Temple, but the whole city, should be pure. The paschal lamb was eaten at home, and the doorposts of the house were sprinkled with its blood. But Ahaz had set up altars at every corner of the city; no devout Israelite could tolerate the symbols of idolatrous worship close to the house in which he celebrated the solemn rites of the Passover. Accordingly before the Passover was killed these altars were removed.[1]

Then the great feast began; but after long years of idolatry neither the people nor the priests and Levites were sufficiently familiar with the rites of the festival to be able to perform them without some difficulty and confusion. As a rule each head of a household killed his own lamb; but many of the worshippers, especially those from the north, were not ceremonially clean: and this task devolved upon the Levites. The immense concourse of worshippers and the additional work thrown upon the Temple ministry must have made extraordinary demands on their zeal and energy.[2] At first apparently they hesitated, and were inclined to abstain from discharging their usual duties. A passover in a month not appointed by Moses, but decided on by the civil authorities without consulting the priesthood, might seem a doubtful and dangerous innovation. Recollecting Azariah's successful assertion of hierarchical

[1] xxx. 14; cf. 2 Kings xviii. 4. The chronicler omits the statement that Hezekiah destroyed Moses's brazen serpent, which the people had hitherto worshipped. His readers would not have understood how this corrupt worship survived the reforms of pious kings and priests who observed the law of Moses.

[2] Cf. xxix. 34, xxx. 3.

prerogative against Uzziah, they might be inclined to attempt a similar resistance to Hezekiah. But the pious enthusiasm of the people clearly showed that the Spirit of Jehovah inspired their somewhat irregular zeal; so that the ecclesiastical officials were shamed out of their unsympathetic attitude, and came forward to take their full share and even more than their full share in this glorious rededication of Israel to Jehovah.

But a further difficulty remained: uncleanness not only disqualified from killing the paschal lambs, but from taking any part in the Passover; and a multitude of the people were unclean. Yet it would have been ungracious and even dangerous to discourage their new-born zeal by excluding them from the festival; moreover, many of them were worshippers from among the ten tribes, who had come in response to a special invitation, which most of their fellow-countrymen had rejected with scorn and contempt. If they had been sent back because they had failed to cleanse themselves according to a ritual of which they were ignorant, and of which Hezekiah might have known they would be ignorant, both the king and his guests would have incurred measureless ridicule from the impious northerners. Accordingly they were allowed to take part in the Passover despite their uncleanness. But this permission could only be granted with serious apprehensions as to its consequences. The Law threatened with death any one who attended the services of the sanctuary in a state of uncleanness.[1] Possibly there were already signs of an outbreak of pestilence; at any rate, the dread of Divine punishment for sacrilegious presumption would distress the whole assembly and

[1] Lev. xv. 31.

mar their enjoyment of Divine fellowship. Again it is no priest or prophet, but the king, the Messiah, who comes forward as the mediator between God and man. Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "Jehovah, in His grace and mercy,[1] pardon every one that setteth his heart to seek Elohim Jehovah, the God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the ritual of the Temple. And Jehovah hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people," *i.e.*, either healed them from actual disease or relieved them from the fear of pestilence.

And so the feast went on happily and prosperously, and was prolonged by acclamation for an additional seven days. During fourteen days king and princes, priests and Levites, Jews and Israelites, rejoiced before Jehovah; thousands of bullocks and sheep smoked upon the altar; and now the priests were not backward: great numbers purified themselves to serve the popular devotion. The priests and Levites sang and made melody to Jehovah, so that the Levites earned the king's special commendation. The great festival ended with a solemn benediction: "The priests[2] arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to His holy habitation, even unto heaven." The priests, and through them the people, received the assurance that their solemn and prolonged worship had met with gracious acceptance.

We have already more than once had occasion to

[1] So Bertheau, i. 1, slightly paraphrasing.

[2] A.R.V., with Masoretic text, "the priests the Levites"; LXX., Vulg. Syr., "the priests and the Levites." The former is more likely to be correct. The verse is partly an echo of Deut. xxvi. 15, so that the chronicler naturally uses the Deuteronomic phrase "the priests the Levites"; but he probably does so unconsciously, without intending to make any special claim for the Levites: hence I have omitted the word in the text.

consider the chronicler's main theme: the importance of the Temple, its ritual, and its ministers. Incidentally and perhaps unconsciously, he here suggests another lesson, which is specially significant as coming from an ardent ritualist, namely the necessary limitations of uniformity in ritual. Hezekiah's celebration of the Passover is full of irregularities: it is held in the wrong month; it is prolonged to twice the usual period; there are amongst the worshippers multitudes of unclean persons, whose presence at these services ought to have been visited with terrible punishment. All is condoned on the ground of emergency, and the ritual laws are set aside without consulting the ecclesiastical officials. Everything serves to emphasise the lesson we touched on in connection with David's sacrifices at the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite: ritual is made for man, and not man for ritual. Complete uniformity may be insisted on in ordinary times, but can be dispensed with in any pressing emergency; necessity knows no law, not even the Torah of the Pentateuch. Moreover, in such emergencies it is not necessary to wait for the initiative or even the sanction of ecclesiastical officials; the supreme authority in the Church in all its great crises resides in the whole body of believers. No one is entitled to speak with greater authority on the limitations of ritual than a strong advocate of the sanctity of ritual like the chronicler; and we may well note, as one of the most conspicuous marks of his inspiration, the sanctified common sense shown by his frank and sympathetic record of the irregularities of Hezekiah's passover. Doubtless emergencies had arisen even in his own experience of the great feasts of the Temple that had taught him this lesson; and it says much for the healthy tone of the Temple community in his day that

he does not attempt to reconcile the practice of Hezekiah with the law of Moses by any harmonistic quibbles.

The work of purification and restoration, however, was still incomplete: the Temple had been cleansed from the pollutions of idolatry, the heathen altars had been removed from Jerusalem, but the high places remained in all the cities of Judah. When the Passover was at last finished, the assembled multitude, "all Israel that were present," set out, like the English or Scotch Puritans, on a great iconoclastic expedition. Throughout the length and breadth of the Land of Promise, throughout Judah and Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh, they brake in pieces the sacred pillars, and hewed down the Asherim, and brake down the high places and altars; then they went home.

Meanwhile Hezekiah was engaged in reorganising the priests and Levites and arranging for the payment and distribution of the sacred dues. The king set an example of liberality by making provision for the daily, weekly, monthly, and festival offerings. The people were not slow to imitate him; they brought first-fruits and tithes in such abundance that four months were spent in piling up heaps of offerings.

"Thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah; and he wrought that which was good, and right, and faithful before Jehovah his God; and in every work that he began in the service of the Temple, and in the Law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and brought it to a successful issue."

Then follow an account of the deliverance from Sennacherib and of Hezekiah's recovery from sickness, a reference to his undue pride in the matter of the embassy from Babylon, and a description of the prosperity of his reign, all for the most part abridged

from the book of Kings. The prophet Isaiah, however, is almost ignored. A few of the more important modifications deserve some little attention. We are told that the Assyrian invasion was "after these things and this faithfulness," in order that we may not forget that the Divine deliverance was a recompense for Hezekiah's loyalty to Jehovah. While the book of Kings tells us that Sennacherib took all the fenced cities of Judah, the chronicler feels that even this measure of misfortune would not have been allowed to befall a king who had just reconciled Israel to Jehovah, and merely says that Sennacherib purposed to break these cities up.

The chronicler [1] has preserved an account of the measures taken by Hezekiah for the defence of his capital: how he stopped up the fountains and water-courses outside the city, so that a besieging army might not find water, and repaired and strengthened the walls, and encouraged his people to trust in Jehovah.

Probably the stopping of the water supply outside the walls was connected with an operation mentioned at the close of the narrative of Hezekiah's reign: "Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David." [2] Moreover, the chronicler's statements are based upon 2 Kings xx. 20, where it is said that "Hezekiah made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city." The chronicler was of course intimately acquainted with the topography of Jerusalem in his own days, and uses his knowledge to interpret and expand the statement in the book of Kings. He was possibly guided in part by Isa. xxii.

[1] xxxii. 2–8, peculiar to Chronicles. [2] xxxii. 30.

9, 11, where the "gathering together the waters of the lower pool" and the "making a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool" are mentioned as precautions taken in view of a probable Assyrian siege. The recent investigations of the Palestine Exploration Fund have led to the discovery of aqueducts, and stoppages, and diversions of watercourses which are said to correspond to the operations mentioned by the chronicler. If this be the case, they show a very accurate knowledge on his part of the topography of Jerusalem in his own day, and also illustrate his care to utilise all existing evidence in order to obtain a clear and accurate interpretation of the statements of his authority.

The reign of Hezekiah appears a suitable opportunity to introduce a few remarks on the importance which the chronicler attaches to the music of the Temple services. Though the music is not more prominent with him than with some earlier kings, yet in the case of David, Solomon, and Jehoshaphat other subjects presented themselves for special treatment; and Hezekiah's reign being the last in which the music of the sanctuary is specially dwelt upon, we are able here to review the various references to this subject. For the most part the chronicler tells his story of the virtuous days of the good kings to a continual accompaniment of Temple music. We hear of the playing and singing when the Ark was brought to the house of Obed-edom; when it was taken into the city of David; at the dedication of the Temple; at the battle between Abijah and Jeroboam; at Asa's reformation; in connection with the overthrow of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Meunim in the reign of Jehoshaphat; at the coronation of Joash; at Hezekiah's feasts; and

again, though less emphatically, at Josiah's passover. No doubt the special prominence given to the subject indicates a professional interest on the part of the author. If, however, music occupies an undue proportion of his space, and he has abridged accounts of more important matters to make room for his favourite theme, yet there is no reason to suppose that his actual statements overrate the extent to which music was used in worship or the importance attached to it. The older narratives refer to the music in the case of David and Joash, and assign psalms and songs to David and Solomon. Moreover, Judaism is by no means alone in its fondness for music, but shares this characteristic with almost all religions.

We have spoken of the chronicler so far chiefly as a professional musician, but it should be clearly understood that the term must be taken in its best sense. He was by no means so absorbed in the technique of his art as to forget its sacred significance; he was not less a worshipper himself because he was the minister or agent of the common worship. His accounts of the festivals show a hearty appreciation of the entire ritual; and his references to the music do not give us the technical circumstances of its production, but rather emphasise its general effect. The chronicler's sense of the religious value of music is largely that of a devout worshipper, who is led to set forth for the benefit of others a truth which is the fruit of his own experience. This experience is not confined to trained musicians; indeed, a scientific knowledge of the art may sometimes interfere with its devotional influence. Criticism may take the place of worship; and the hearer, instead of yielding to the sacred suggestions of hymn or anthem, may be distracted by his æsthetic judgment as to the

merits of the composition and the skill shown by its rendering. In the same way critical appreciation of voice, elocution, literary style, and intellectual power does not always conduce to edification from a sermon. In the truest culture, however, sensitiveness to these secondary qualities has become habitual and automatic, and blends itself imperceptibly with the religious consciousness of spiritual influence. The latter is thus helped by excellence and only slightly hindered by minor defects in the natural means. But the very absence of any great scientific knowledge of music may leave the spirit open to the spell which sacred music is intended to exercise, so that all cheerful and guileless souls may be "moved with concord of sweet sounds," and sad and weary hearts find comfort in subdued strains that breathe sympathy of which words are incapable.

Music, as a mode of utterance moving within the restraints of a regular order, naturally attaches itself to ritual. As the earliest literature is poetry, the earliest liturgy is musical. Melody is the simplest and most obvious means by which the utterances of a body of worshippers can be combined into a seemly act of worship. The mere repetition of the same words by a congregation in ordinary speech is apt to be wanting in impressiveness or even in decorum; the use of tune enables a congregation to unite in worship even when many of its members are strangers to each other.

Again, music may be regarded as an expansion of language: not new dialect, but a collection of symbols that can express thought, and more especially emotion, for which mere speech has no vocabulary. This new form of language naturally becomes an auxiliary of

religion. Words are clumsy instruments for the expression of the heart, and are least efficient when they undertake to set forth moral and spiritual ideas. Music can transcend mere speech in touching the soul to fine issues, suggesting visions of things ineffable and unseen.

Browning makes Abt Vogler say of the most enduring and supreme hopes that God has granted to men, "'Tis we musicians know"; but the message of music comes home with power to many who have no skill in its art.

CHAPTER IX

MANASSEH: REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS

2 CHRON. xxxiii.

IN telling the melancholy story of the wickedness of Manasseh in the first period of his reign, the chronicler reproduces the book of Kings, with one or two omissions and other slight alterations. He omits the name of Manasseh's mother; she was called Hephzi-bah—"My pleasure is in her." In any case, when the son of a godly father turns out badly, and nothing is known about the mother, uncharitable people might credit her with his wickedness. But the chronicler's readers were familiar with the great influence of the queen-mother in Oriental states. When they read that the son of Hezekiah came to the throne at the age of twelve and afterwards gave himself up to every form of idolatry, they would naturally ascribe his departure from his father's ways to the suggestions of his mother. The chronicler is not willing that the pious Hezekiah should lie under the imputation of having taken delight in an ungodly woman, and so her name is omitted.

The contents of 2 Kings xxi. 10–16 are also omitted; they consist of a prophetic utterance and further particulars as to the sins of Manasseh; they are virtually replaced by the additional information in Chronicles.

From the point of view of the chronicler, the history

of Manasseh in the book of Kings was far from satisfactory. The earlier writer had not only failed to provide materials from which a suitable moral could be deduced, but he had also told the story so that undesirable conclusions might be drawn. Manasseh sinned more wickedly than any other king of Judah: Ahaz merely polluted and closed the Temple, but Manasseh "built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the Temple," and set up in it an idol. And yet in the earlier narrative this most wicked king escaped without any personal punishment at all. Moreover, length of days was one of the rewards which Jehovah was wont to bestow upon the righteous; but while Ahaz was cut off at thirty-six, in the prime of manhood, Manasseh survived to the mature age of sixty-seven, and reigned fifty-five years.

However, the history reached the chronicler in a more satisfactory form. Manasseh was duly punished, and his long reign fully accounted for.[1] When, in spite of Divine warning, Manasseh and his people persisted in their sin, Jehovah sent against them "the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh in chains, and bound him with fetters,[2] and carried him to Babylon."

The Assyrian invasion referred to here is partially confirmed by the fact that the name of Manasseh occurs amongst the tributaries of Esarhaddon and his successor, Assur-bani-pal. The mention of Babylon as his place of captivity rather than Nineveh may be accounted for by supposing that Manasseh was taken

[1] xxxiii. 11–19, peculiar to Chronicles.

[2] So R.V.: A.V., "among the thorns"; R.V. marg., "with hooks," if so in a figurative sense. Others take the word as a proper name: Hôhîm.

prisoner in the reign of Esarhaddon. This king of Assyria rebuilt Babylon, and spent much of his time there. He is said to have been of a kindly disposition, and to have exercised towards other royal captives the same clemency which he extended to Manasseh. For the Jewish king's misfortunes led him to repentance: "When he was in trouble, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto him." Amongst the Greek Apocrypha is found a "Prayer of Manasses," doubtless intended by its author to represent the prayer referred to in Chronicles. In it Manasseh celebrates the Divine glory, confesses his great wickedness, and asks that his penitence may be accepted and that he may obtain deliverance.

If these were the terms of Manasseh's prayers, they were heard and answered; and the captive king returned to Jerusalem a devout worshipper and faithful servant of Jehovah. He at once set to work to undo the evil he had wrought in the former period of his reign. He took away the idol and the heathen altars from the Temple, restored the altar of Jehovah, and re-established the Temple services. In earlier days he had led the people into idolatry; now he commanded them to serve Jehovah, and the people obediently followed the king's example. Apparently he found it impracticable to interfere with the high places; but they were so far purified from corruption that, though the people still sacrificed at these illegal sanctuaries, they worshipped exclusively Jehovah, the God of Israel.

Like most of the pious kings, his prosperity was partly shown by his extensive building operations. Following in the footsteps of Jotham, he strengthened

or repaired the fortifications of Jerusalem, especially about Ophel. He further provided for the safety of his dominions by placing captains, and doubtless also garrisons, in the fenced cities of Judah. The interest taken by the Jews of the second Temple in the history of Manasseh is shown by the fact that the chronicler is able to mention, not only the "Acts of the Kings of Israel," but a second authority: "The History of the Seers." The imagination of the Targumists and other later writers embellished the history of Manasseh's captivity and release with many striking and romantic circumstances.

The life of Manasseh practically completes the chronicler's series of object-lessons in the doctrine of retribution; the history of the later kings only provides illustrations similar to those already given. These object-lessons are closely connected with the teaching of Ezekiel. In dealing with the question of heredity in guilt, the prophet is led to set forth the character and fortunes of four different classes of men. First[1] we have two simple cases: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. These have been respectively illustrated by the prosperity of Solomon and Jotham and the misfortunes of Jehoram, Ahaziah, Athaliah, and Ahaz. Again, departing somewhat from the order of Ezekiel—"When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations of the wicked man, shall he live? None of his righteous deeds that he hath done shall be remembered; in his trespass that he hath trespassed and in his sin that he hath

[1] Ezek. xviii. 20.

sinned he shall die"—here we have the principle that in Chronicles governs the Divine dealings with the kings who began to reign well and then fell away into sin: Asa, Joash, Amaziah, and Uzziah.

We reached this point in our discussion of the doctrine of retribution in connection with Asa. So far the lessons taught were salutary: they might deter from sin; but they were gloomy and depressing: they gave little encouragement to hope for success in the struggle after righteousness, and suggested that few would escape terrible penalties of failure. David and Solomon formed a class by themselves; an ordinary man could not aspire to their almost supernatural virtue. In his later history the chronicler is chiefly bent on illustrating the frailty of man and the wrath of God. The New Testament teaches a similar lesson when it asks, "If the righteous is scarcely saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?"[1] But in Chronicles not even the righteous is saved. Again and again we are told at a king's accession that he "did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah"; and yet before the reign closes he forfeits the Divine favour, and at last dies ruined and disgraced.

But this sombre picture is relieved by occasional gleams of light. Ezekiel furnishes a fourth type of religious experience: "If the wicked turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live; he shall not die. None of his transgressions that he hath committed shall be remembered against him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, saith the

[1] 1 Peter iv. 18.

Lord Jehovah, and not rather that he should return from his way and live?"[1] The one striking and complete example of this principle is the history of Manasseh. It is true that Rehoboam also repented, but the chronicler does not make it clear that his repentance was permanent. Manasseh is unique alike in extreme wickedness, sincere penitence, and thorough reformation. The reformation of Julius Cæsar or of our Henry V., or, to take a different class of instance, the conversion of St. Paul, was nothing compared to the conversion of Manasseh. It was as though Herod the Great or Cæsar Borgia had been checked midway in a career of cruelty and vice, and had thenceforward lived pure and holy lives, glorifying God by ministering to their fellow-men. Such a repentance gives us hope for the most abandoned. In the forgiveness of Manasseh the penitent sinner receives assurance that God will forgive even the most guilty. The account of his closing years shows that even a career of desperate wickedness in the past need not hinder the penitent from rendering acceptable service to God and ending his life in the enjoyment of Divine favour and blessing. Manasseh becomes in the Old Testament what the Prodigal Son is in the New: the one great symbol of the possibilities of human nature and the infinite mercy of God.

The chronicler's theology is as simple and straightforward as that of Ezekiel. Manasseh repents, submits himself, and is forgiven. His captivity apparently had expiated his guilt, as far as expiation was necessary. Neither prophet nor chronicler was conscious of the moral difficulties that have been found in so simple a

[1] Ezek. xviii. 21–23.

plan of salvation. The problems of an objective atonement had not yet risen above their horizon.

These incidents afford another illustration of the necessary limitations of ritual. In the great crisis of Manasseh's spiritual life, the Levitical ordinances played no part; they moved on a lower level, and ministered to less urgent needs. Probably the worship of Jehovah was still suspended during Manasseh's captivity; none the less Manasseh was able to make his peace with God. Even if they were punctually observed, of what use were services at the Temple in Jerusalem to a penitent sinner at Babylon? When Manasseh returned to Jerusalem, he restored the Temple worship, and offered sacrifices of peace-offerings and of thanksgiving; nothing is said about sin-offerings. His sacrifices were not the condition of his pardon, but the seal and token of a reconciliation already effected. The experience of Manasseh anticipated that of the Jews of the Captivity: he discovered the possibility of fellowship with Jehovah, far away from the Holy Land, without temple, priest, or sacrifice. The chronicler, perhaps unconsciously already foreshadows the coming of the hour when men should worship the Father neither in the holy mountain of Samaria nor yet in Jerusalem.

Before relating the outward acts which testified the sincerity of Manasseh's repentance, the chronicler devotes a single sentence to the happy influence of forgiveness and deliverance upon Manasseh himself. When his prayer had been heard, and his exile was at an end, *then* Manasseh knew and acknowledged that Jehovah was God. Men first begin to know God when they have been forgiven. The alienated and disobedient, if they think of Him at all, merely have glimpses of His vengeance and try to persuade them-

selves that He is a stern Tyrant. By the penitent not yet assured of the possibility of reconciliation God is chiefly thought of as a righteous Judge. What did the Prodigal Son know about his father when he asked for the portion of goods that fell to him or while he was wasting his substance in riotous living? Even when he came to himself, he thought of the father's house as a place where there was bread enough and to spare; and he supposed that his father might endure to see him living at home in permanent disgrace, on the footing of a hired servant. When he reached home, after he had been met a great way off with compassion and been welcomed with an embrace, he began for the first time to understand his father's character. So the knowledge of God's love dawns upon the soul in the blessed experience of forgiveness; and because love and forgiveness are more strange and unearthly than rebuke and chastisement, the sinner is humbled by pardon far more than by punishment; and his trembling submission to the righteous Judge deepens into profounder reverence and awe for the God who can forgive, who is superior to all vindictiveness, whose infinite resources enable Him to blot out the guilt, to cancel the penalty, and annul the consequences of sin.

> "There is forgiveness with Thee,
> That Thou mayest be feared."[1]

The words that stand in the forefront of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name," are virtually a petition that sinners may repent, and be converted, and obtain forgiveness.

[1] Psalm cxxx. 4, probably belonging to about the same period as Chronicles.

In seeking for a Christian parallel to the doctrine expounded by Ezekiel and illustrated by Chronicles, we have to remember that the permanent elements in primitive doctrine are often to be found by removing the limitations which imperfect faith has imposed on the possibilities of human nature and Divine mercy. We have already suggested that the chronicler's somewhat rigid doctrine of temporal rewards and punishments symbolises the inevitable influence of conduct on the development of character. The doctrine of God's attitude towards backsliding and repentance seems somewhat arbitrary as set forth by Ezekiel and Chronicles. A man apparently is not to be judged by his whole life, but only by the moral period that is closed by his death. If his last years be pious, his former transgressions are forgotten; if his last years be evil, his righteous deeds are equally forgotten. While we gratefully accept the forgiveness of sinners, such teaching as to backsliders seems a little cynical; and though, by God's grace and discipline, a man may be led through and out of sin into righteousness, we are naturally suspicious of a life of "righteous deeds" which towards its close lapses into gross and open sin. "Nemo repente turpissimus fit." We are inclined to believe that the final lapse reveals the true bias of the whole character. But the chronicler suggests more than this: by his history of the almost uniform failure of the pious kings to persevere to the end, he seems to teach that the piety of early and mature life is either unreal or else is unable to survive as body and mind wear out. This doctrine has sometimes, inconsiderately no doubt, been taught from Christian pulpits; and yet the truth of which the doctrine is a misrepresentation supplies a correction of the former principle

that a life is to be judged by its close. Putting aside any question of positive sin, a man's closing years sometimes seem cold, narrow, and selfish when once he was full of tender and considerate sympathy; and yet the man is no Asa or Amaziah who has deserted the living God for idols of wood and stone. The man has not changed, only our impression of him. Unconsciously we are influenced by the contrast between his present state and the splendid energy and devotion or self-sacrifice that marked his prime; we forget that inaction is his misfortune, and not his fault; we overrate his ardour in the days when vigorous action was a delight for its own sake; and we overlook the quiet heroism with which remnants of strength are still utilised in the Lord's service, and do not consider that moments of fretfulness are due to decay and disease that at once increase the need of patience and diminish the powers of endurance. Muscles and nerves slowly become less and less efficient; they fail to carry to the soul full and clear reports of the outside world; they are no longer satisfactory instruments by which the soul can express its feelings or execute its will. We are less able than ever to estimate the inner life of such by that which we see and hear. While we are thankful for the sweet serenity and loving sympathy which often make the hoary head a crown of glory, we are also entitled to judge some of God's more militant children by their years of arduous service, and not by their impatience of enforced inactivity.

If our author's statement of these truths seem unsatisfactory, we must remember that his lack of a doctrine of the future life placed him at a serious disadvantage. He wished to exhibit a complete picture of God's dealings with the characters of his history, so that

their lives should furnish exact illustrations of the working of sin and righteousness. He was controlled and hampered by the idea that underlies many discussions in the Old Testament: that God's righteous judgment upon a man's actions is completely manifested during his earthly life. It may be possible to assert an *eternal* providence; but conscience and heart have long since revolted against the doctrine that God's justice, to say nothing of His love, is declared by the misery of lives that might have been innocent, if they had ever had the opportunity of knowing what innocence meant. The chronicler worked on too small a scale for his subject. The entire Divine economy of Him with whom a thousand years are as one day cannot be even outlined for a single soul in the history of its earthly existence. These narratives of Jewish kings are only imperfect symbols of the infinite possibilities of the eternal providence. The moral of Chronicles is very much that of the Greek sage, "Call no man happy till he is dead"; but since Christ has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel, we no longer pass final judgment upon either the man or his happiness by what we know of his life here. The decisive revelation of character, the final judgment upon conduct, the due adjustment of the gifts and discipline of God, are deferred to a future life. When these are completed, and the soul has attained to good or evil beyond all reversal, then we shall feel, with Ezekiel and the chronicler, that there is no further need to remember either the righteous deeds or the transgressions of earlier stages of its history.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST KINGS OF JUDAH

2 CHRON. xxxiv.–xxxvi.

WHATEVER influence Manasseh's reformation exercised over his people generally, the taint of idolatry was not removed from his own family. His son Amon succeeded him at the age of two-and-twenty. Into his reign of two years he compressed all the varieties of wickedness once practised by his father, and undid the good work of Manasseh's later years. He recovered the graven images which Manasseh had discarded, replaced them in their shrines, and worshipped them instead of Jehovah. But in his case there was no repentance, and he was cut off in his youth.

In the absence of any conclusive evidence as to the date of Manasseh's reformation, we cannot determine with certainty whether Amon received his early training before or after his father returned to the worship of Jehovah. In either case Manasseh's earlier history would make it difficult for him to counteract any evil influence that drew Amon towards idolatry. Amon could set the example and perhaps the teaching of his father's former days against any later exhortations to righteousness. When a father has helped to lead his children astray, he cannot be sure that he will carry them with him in his repentance.

After Amon's assassination the people placed his son Josiah on the throne. Like Joash and Manasseh, Josiah was a child, only eight years old. The chronicler follows the general line of the history in the book of Kings, modifying, abridging, and expanding, but introducing no new incidents; the reformation, the repairing of the Temple, the discovery of the book of the Law, the Passover, Josiah's defeat and death at Megiddo, are narrated by both historians. We have only to notice differences in a somewhat similar treatment of the same subject.

Beyond the general statement that Josiah "did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah" we hear nothing about him in the book of Kings till the eighteenth year of his reign, and his reformation and putting away of idolatry is placed in that year. The chronicler's authorities corrected the statement that the pious king tolerated idolatry for eighteen years. They record how in the eighth year of his reign, when he was sixteen, he began to seek after the God of David; and in his twelfth year he set about the work of utterly destroying idols throughout the whole territory of Israel, in the cities and ruins of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, as well as in Judah and Benjamin. Seeing that the cities assigned to Simeon were in the south of Judah, it is a little difficult to understand why they appear with the northern tribes, unless they are reckoned with them technically to make up the ancient number.

The consequence of this change of date is that in Chronicles the reformation precedes the discovery of the book of the Law, whereas in the older history this discovery is the cause of the reformation. The chronicler's account of the idols and other apparatus of

false worship destroyed by Josiah is much less detailed than that of the book of Kings. To have reproduced the earlier narrative in full would have raised serious difficulties. According to the chronicler, Manasseh had purged Jerusalem of idols and idol altars; and Amon alone was responsible for any that existed there at the accession of Josiah: but in the book of Kings Josiah found in Jerusalem the altars erected by the kings of Judah and the horses they had given to the sun. Manasseh's altars still stood in the courts of the Temple; and over against Jerusalem there still remained the high places that Solomon had built for Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Milcom. As the chronicler in describing Solomon's reign carefully omitted all mention of his sins, so he omits this reference to his idolatry. Moreover, if he had inserted it, he would have had to explain how these high places escaped the zeal of the many pious kings who did away with the high places. Similarly, having omitted the account of the man of God who prophesied the ruin of Jeroboam's sanctuary at Bethel, he here omits the fulfilment of that prophecy.

The account of the repairing of the Temple is enlarged by the insertion of various details as to the names, functions, and zeal of the Levites, amongst whom those who had skill in instruments of music seem to have had the oversight of the workmen. We are reminded of the walls of Thebes, which rose out of the ground while Orpheus played upon his flute. Similarly in the account of the assembly called to hear the contents of the book of the Law the Levites are substituted for the prophets. This book of the Law is said in Chronicles to have been given by Moses, but his name is not connected with the book in the parallel narrative in the book of Kings.

The earlier authority simply states that Josiah held a great passover; Chronicles, as usual, describes the festival in detail. First of all, the king commanded the priests and Levites to purify themselves and take their places in due order, so that they might be ready to perform their sacred duties. The narrative is very obscure, but it seems that either during the apostacy of Amon or on account of the recent Temple repairs the Ark had been removed from the Holy of holies. The Law had specially assigned to the Levites the duty of carrying the Tabernacle and its furniture, and they seem to have thought that they were only bound to exercise the function of carrying the Ark; they perhaps proposed to bear it in solemn procession round the city as part of the celebration of the Passover, forgetting the words of David[1] that the Levites should no more carry the Tabernacle and its vessels. They would have been glad to substitute this conspicuous and honourable service for the laborious and menial work of flaying the victims. Josiah, however, commanded them to put the Ark into the Temple and attend to their other duties.

Next, the king and his nobles provided beasts of various kinds for the sacrifices and the Passover meal. Josiah's gifts were even more munificent than those of Hezekiah. The latter had given a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep; Josiah gave just three times as many. Moreover, at Hezekiah's passover no offerings of the princes are mentioned, but now they added their gifts to those of the king. The heads of the priesthood provided three hundred oxen and two thousand six hundred small cattle for the priests, and the chiefs of the Levites five hundred oxen and five thousand small

[1] 1 Chron. xxiii. 26, peculiar to Chronicles.

cattle for the Levites. But numerous as were the victims at Josiah's passover, they still fell far short of the great sacrifice[1] of twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep which Solomon offered at the dedication of the Temple.

Then began the actual work of the sacrifices: the victims were killed and flayed, and their blood was sprinkled on the altar; the burnt offerings were distributed among the people; the Passover lambs were roasted, and the other offerings boiled, and the Levites "carried them quickly to all the children of the people." Apparently private individuals could not find the means of cooking the bountiful provision made for them; and, to meet the necessity of the case, the Temple courts were made kitchen as well as slaughterhouse for the assembled worshippers. The other offerings would not be eaten with the Passover lamb, but would serve for the remaining days of the feast.

The Levites not only provided for the people, for themselves, and the priests, but the Levites who ministered in the matter of the sacrifices also prepared for their brethren who were singers and porters, so that the latter were enabled to attend undisturbed to their own special duties; all the members of the guild of porters were at the gates maintaining order among the crowd of worshippers; and the full strength of the orchestra and choir contributed to the beauty and solemnity of the services. It was the greatest Passover held by any Israelite king.

Josiah's passover, like that of Hezekiah, was followed by a formidable foreign invasion; but whereas

[1] 2 Chron. vii. 5. The figures are peculiar to Chronicles; 1 Kings viii. 5 says that the victims could not be counted

Hezekiah was rewarded for renewed loyalty by a triumphant deliverance, Josiah was defeated and slain. These facts subject the chronicler's theory of retribution to a severe strain. His perplexity finds pathetic expression in the opening words of the new section, "After all this," after all the idols had been put away, after the celebration of the most magnificent Passover the monarchy had ever seen. After all this, when we looked for the promised rewards of piety—for fertile seasons, peace and prosperity at home, victory and dominion abroad, tribute from subject peoples, and wealth from successful commerce—after all this, the rout of the armies of Jehovah at Megiddo, the flight and death of the wounded king, the lamentation over Josiah, the exaltation of a nominee of Pharaoh to the throne, and the payment of tribute to the Egyptian king. The chronicler has no complete explanation of this painful mystery, but he does what he can to meet the difficulties of the case. Like the great prophets in similar instances, he regards the heathen king as charged with a Divine commission. Pharaoh's appeal to Josiah to remain neutral should have been received by the Jewish king as an authoritative message from Jehovah. It was the failure to discern in a heathen king the mouthpiece and prophet of Jehovah that cost Josiah his life and Judah its liberty.

The chronicler had no motive for lingering over the last sad days of the monarchy; the rest of his narrative is almost entirely abridged from the book of Kings. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah pass over the scene in rapid and melancholy succession. In the case of Jehoahaz, who only reigned three months, the chronicler omits the unfavourable judgment recorded in the book of Kings; but he repeats it for the other three,

even for the poor lad of eight[1] who was carried away captive after a reign of three months and ten days. The chronicler had not learnt that kings can do no wrong; on the other hand, the ungodly policy of Jehoiachin's ministers is labelled with the name of the boy-sovereign.

Each of these kings in turn was deposed and carried away into captivity, unless indeed Jehoiakim is an exception. In the book of Kings we are told that he slept with his fathers, *i.e.*, that he died and was buried in the royal tombs at Jerusalem, a statement which the LXX. inserts here also, specifying, however, that he was buried in the garden of Uzza. If the pious Josiah were punished for a single error by defeat and death, why was the wicked Jehoiakim allowed to reign till the end of his life and then die in his bed? The chronicler's information differed from that of the earlier narrative in a way that removed, or at any rate suppressed the difficulty. He omits the statement that Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and tells us[2] that Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon. Casual readers would naturally suppose that this purpose was carried out, and that the Divine justice was satisfied by Jehoiakim's death in captivity; and yet if they compared this passage with that in the book of Kings, it might occur to them that after the king had been put in chains something might have led Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind, or, like Manasseh, Jehoiakim might have repented and been allowed to return. But it is very doubtful whether the chronicler's authorities contemplated the possibility of such an interpretation; it is scarcely fair to credit

[1] Jehoiachin. The ordinary reading in 2 Kings xxiv. 8 makes him eighteen.

[2] xxxvi. 6 *b*, peculiar to Chronicles.

them with all the subtle devices of modern commentators.

The real conclusion of the chronicler's history of the kings of the house of David is a summary of the sins of the last days of the monarchy and of the history of its final ruin in xxxvi. 14–20.[1] All the chief of the priests and of the people were given over to the abominations of idolatry; and in spite of constant and urgent admonitions from the prophets of Jehovah, they hardened their hearts, and mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of Jehovah arose against His people, and there was no healing.

However, to this peroration a note is added that the length of the Captivity was fixed at seventy years, in order that the land might "enjoy her sabbaths." This note rests upon Lev. xxv. 1–7, according to which the land was to be left fallow every seventh year. The seventy years' captivity would compensate for seventy periods of six years each during which no sabbatical years had been observed. Thus the Captivity, with the four hundred and twenty previous years of neglect, would be equivalent to seventy sabbatical periods. There is no economy in keeping back what is due to God.

Moreover, the editor who separated Chronicles from the book of Ezra and Nehemiah was loath to allow the first part of the history to end in a gloomy record of sin and ruin. Modern Jews, in reading the last chapter of Isaiah, rather than conclude with the ill-omened words of the last two verses, repeat a previous portion of the chapter. So here to the history of the ruin of

[1] Mostly peculiar to Chronicles.

Jerusalem the editor has appended two verses from the opening of the book of Ezra, which contain the decree of Cyrus authorising the return from the Captivity. And thus Chronicles concludes in the middle of a sentence which is completed in the book of Ezra: "Who is there among you of all his people? Jehovah his God be with him, and let him go up. . . ."

Such a conclusion suggests two considerations which will form a fitting close to our exposition. Chronicles is not a finished work; it has no formal end; it rather breaks off abruptly like an interrupted diary. In like manner the book of Kings concludes with a note as to the treatment of the captive Jehoiachin at Babylon: the last verse runs, "And for his allowance there was a continual allowance given him of the king, every day a portion, all the days of his life." The book of Nehemiah has a short final prayer: "Remember me, O my God, for good"; but the preceding paragraph is simply occupied with the arrangements for the wood offering and the first-fruits. So in the New Testament the history of the Church breaks off with the statement that St. Paul abode two whole years in his own hired house, preaching the kingdom of God. The sacred writers recognise the continuity of God's dealings with His people; they do not suggest that one period can be marked off by a clear dividing line or interval from another. Each historian leaves, as it were, the loose ends of his work ready to be taken up and continued by his successors. The Holy Spirit seeks to stimulate the Church to a forward outlook, that it may expect and work for a future wherein the power and grace of God will be no less manifest than in the past. Moreover, the final editor of Chronicles has shown himself unwilling that the book should conclude with a gloomy

record of sin and ruin, and has appended a few lines to remind his readers of the new life of faith and hope that lay beyond the Captivity. In so doing, he has echoed the key-note of prophecy: ever beyond man's transgression and punishment the prophets saw the vision of his forgiveness and restoration to God.